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THE NEW YORKER

NOV. 19, 2001

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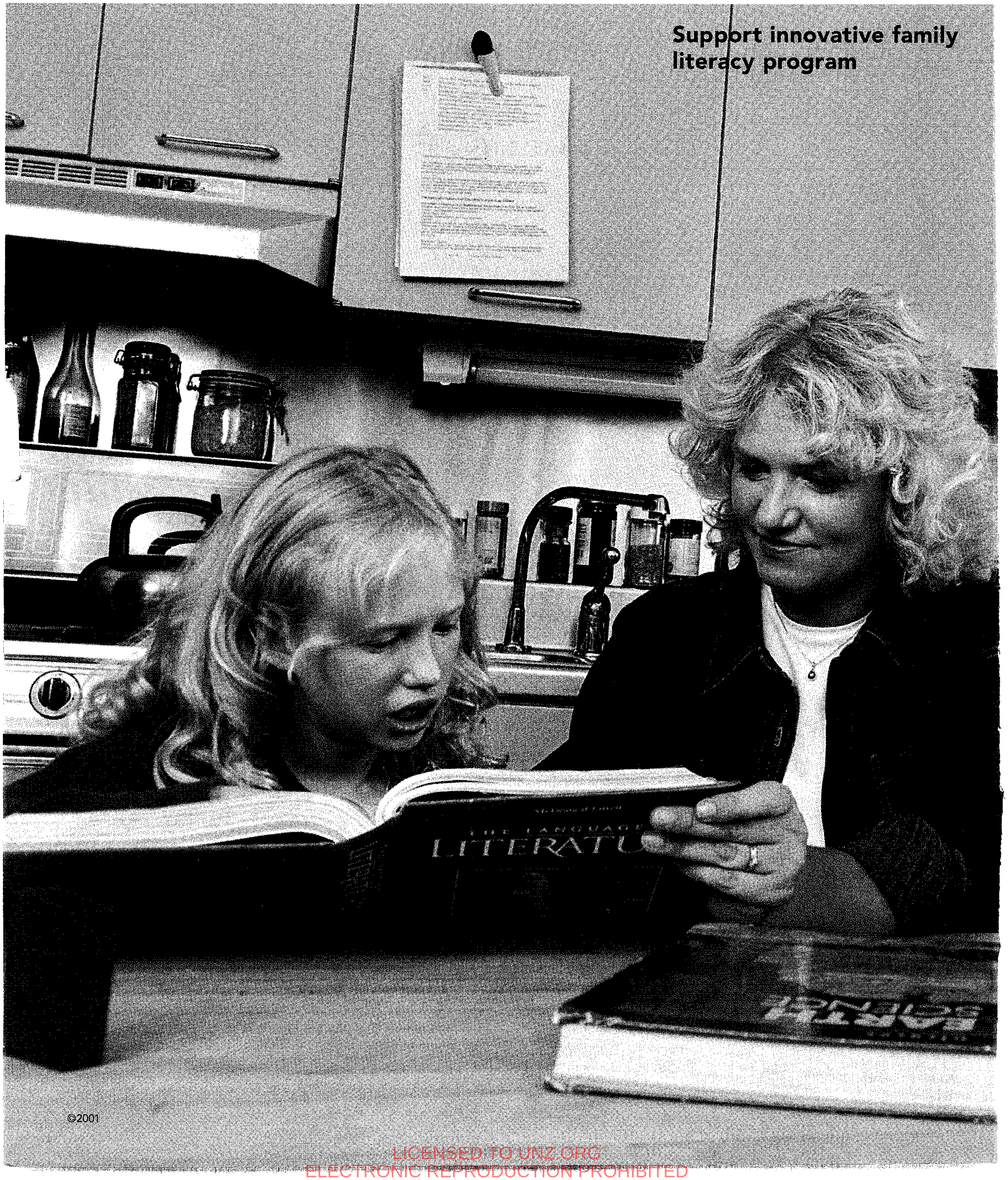

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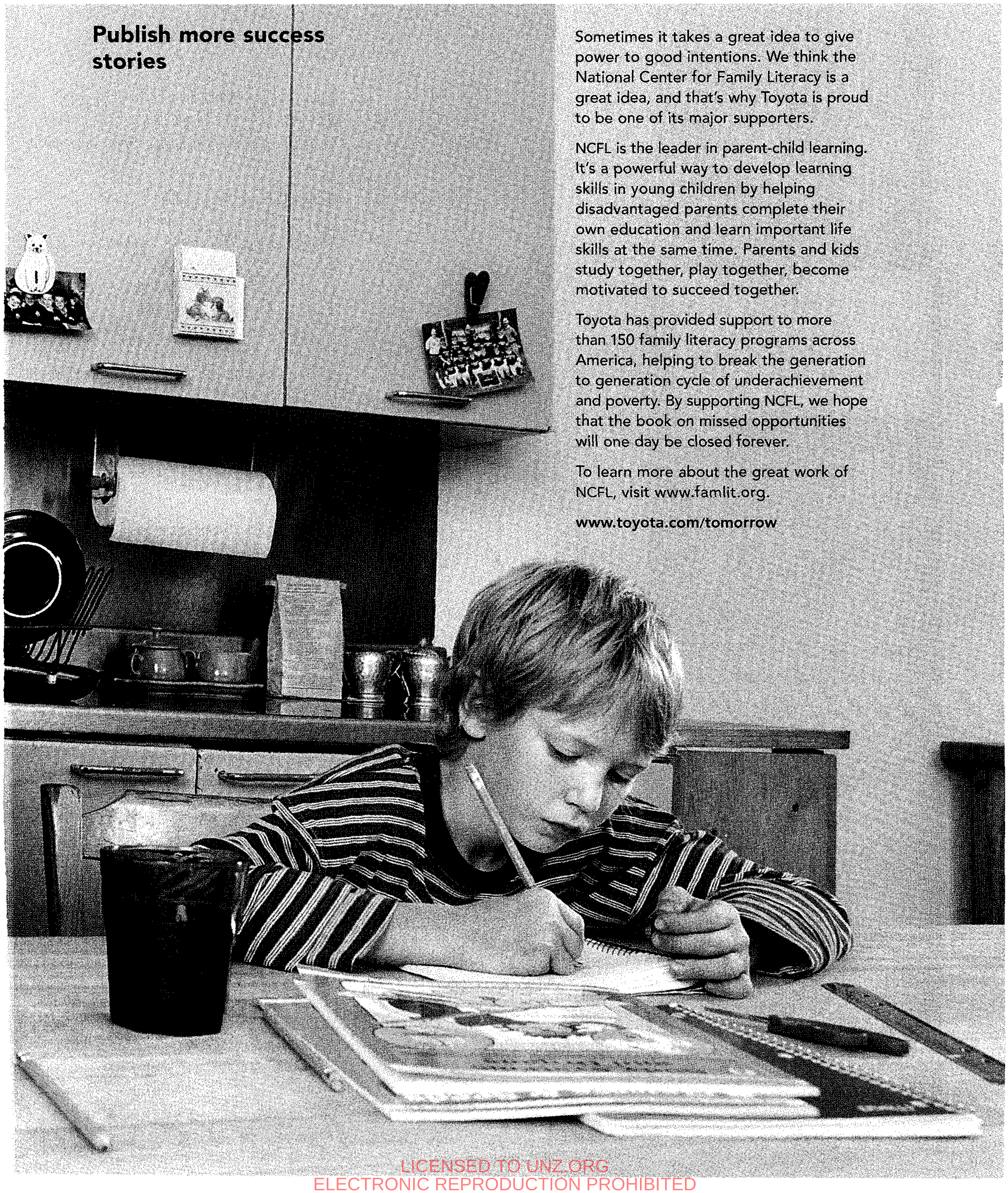

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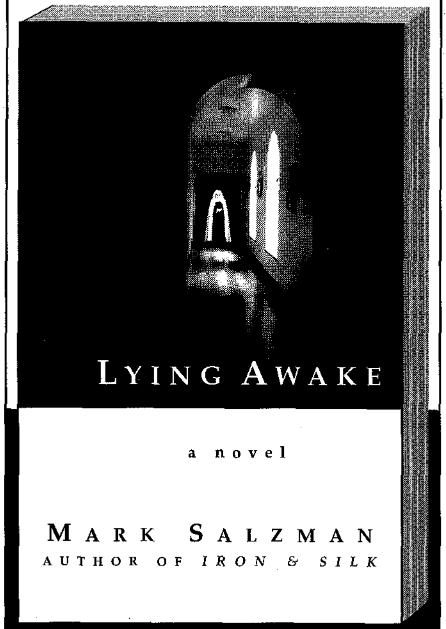

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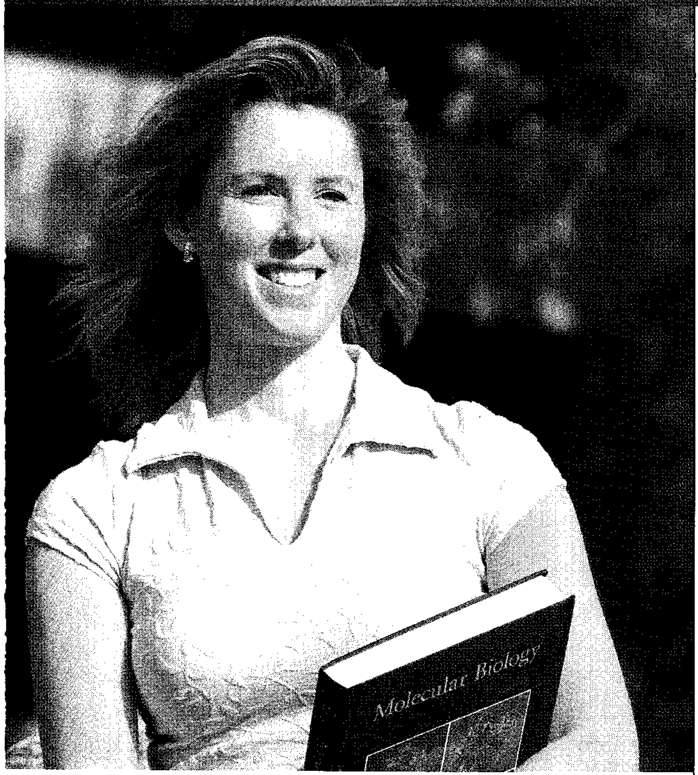
Novartis and Suzan drove her Cancer into remission in 35 days.



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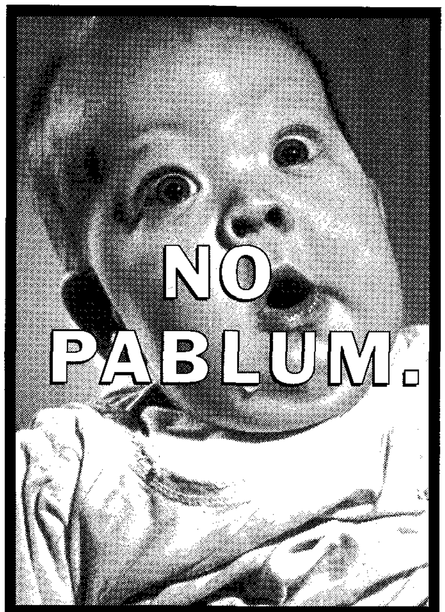

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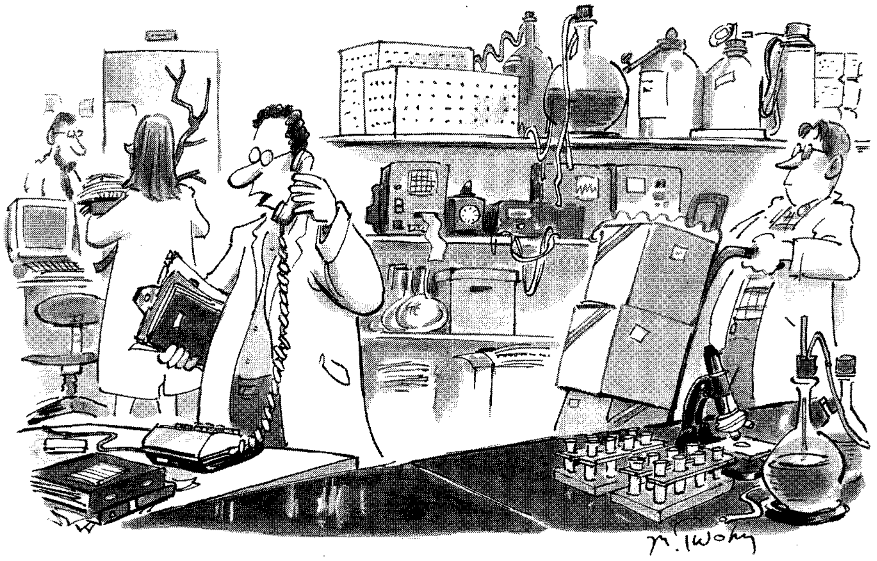

"Can I call you back? We're in the middle of transitioning from tree-frog allergies to bioterrorism."

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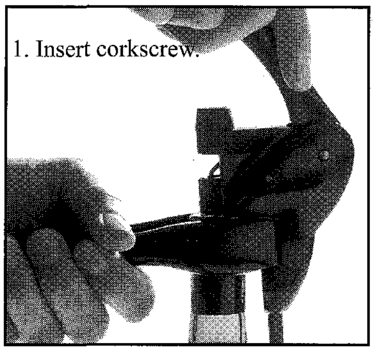

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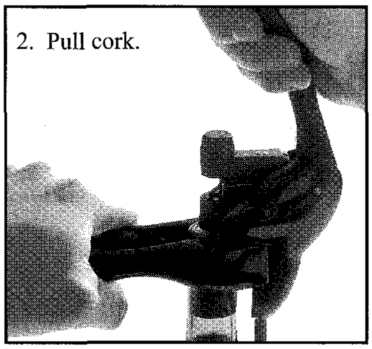

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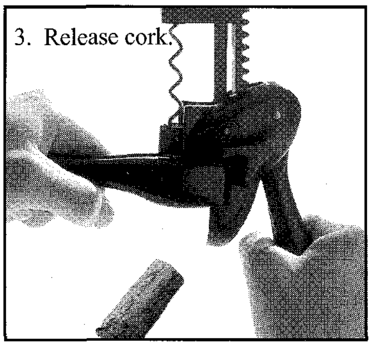

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THE MAIL

FEAR AND THE FLU

Malcolm Gladwell, in his Talk of the Town piece comparing anthrax with the arguably greater threat of influenza, asks why the United States hasn't "mounted an aggressive flu-vaccination program" (October 29th). There was such an attempt in 1976, when scientists became convinced that the new swine-flu virus would be a particularly virulent one. Fearing a pandemic on the scale of 1918's, they urged the government to vaccinate almost everyone. As it turned out, that year's flu was not especially bad, but hundreds of people who were vaccinated came down with Guillain-Barré syndrome, a nerve disease. Rightly or not, this misstep made the government reluctant to consider a mass vaccination again.

Patience Hutchinson
San Francisco, Calif.

BUILDING AFGHANISTAN

Nicholas Lemann quotes Kenneth Adelman, who he notes has the ear of the Administration, as saying, "My model would be, kick out the existing government, that's fine, and then if the Northern Alliance starts fighting, I don't care" ("What Terrorists Want," October 29th). He should care, a lot. Civil chaos is often a breeding ground for terrorism and the related ill of civil war. Just knocking things down will never make the world safe. Adelman says we are almost on a "divine mission" in Afghanistan. That will be true only if we leave a framework for peace and stability in our wake.

Jason Mark
San Francisco, Calif.

LINCOLN'S HERO

Joseph J. Ellis writes that Alexander Hamilton's "antislavery credentials were vastly superior" to Thomas Jefferson's (Books, October 29th). Jefferson, for all his objections to the institution of slavery, owned slaves himself—but so did Hamilton. The Virginia planter had more than a hundred slaves, and the New York lawyer just a few, but the charge of hypocrisy fits them both. Jefferson's efforts, however, made manumission legal in Virginia in 1782, and led to the ban on slavery in the Northwest in 1787. Hamilton's actions were limited to membership in the New York Manumission Society and a proposal to free slaves in return for service in the Revolutionary War. It should not have been surprising to Ellis that Lincoln found more to admire in Jefferson.

Andrew Browning
Portland, Ore.

GET OUT OF THE WAY

James Surowiecki notes that "a truck driver's ultimate perk is never having to get anywhere near" New York City (The Talk of the Town, October 29th). It's no exaggeration, and the problem goes beyond the car traffic Surowiecki cites. My husband is a driver of oversized loads that can be dangerous: subway cars, cement and steel for bridges and buildings, and, sadly, heavy equipment to clear debris. But he's treated as though he were just out to make New Yorkers' lives miserable—they react with obscene gestures and language, cut him and his escort drivers off, or refuse, as if it were a matter of pride, to get out of the way. The city's reputation for aggression toward drivers extends beyond America, into Canada and Mexico. And yet drivers spend a lot of their time worrying about the safety of New Yorkers, who ignore their yellow danger lights. Trucks are helping to restock and rebuild the city. All you have to do is let them pass.

Linda Doebler
Emlenton, Pa.

EDITORS' NOTE: Because of a production error, an endnote crediting Chris Szechenyi for additional reporting was omitted from "The House of bin Laden," by Jane Mayer (November 12th).

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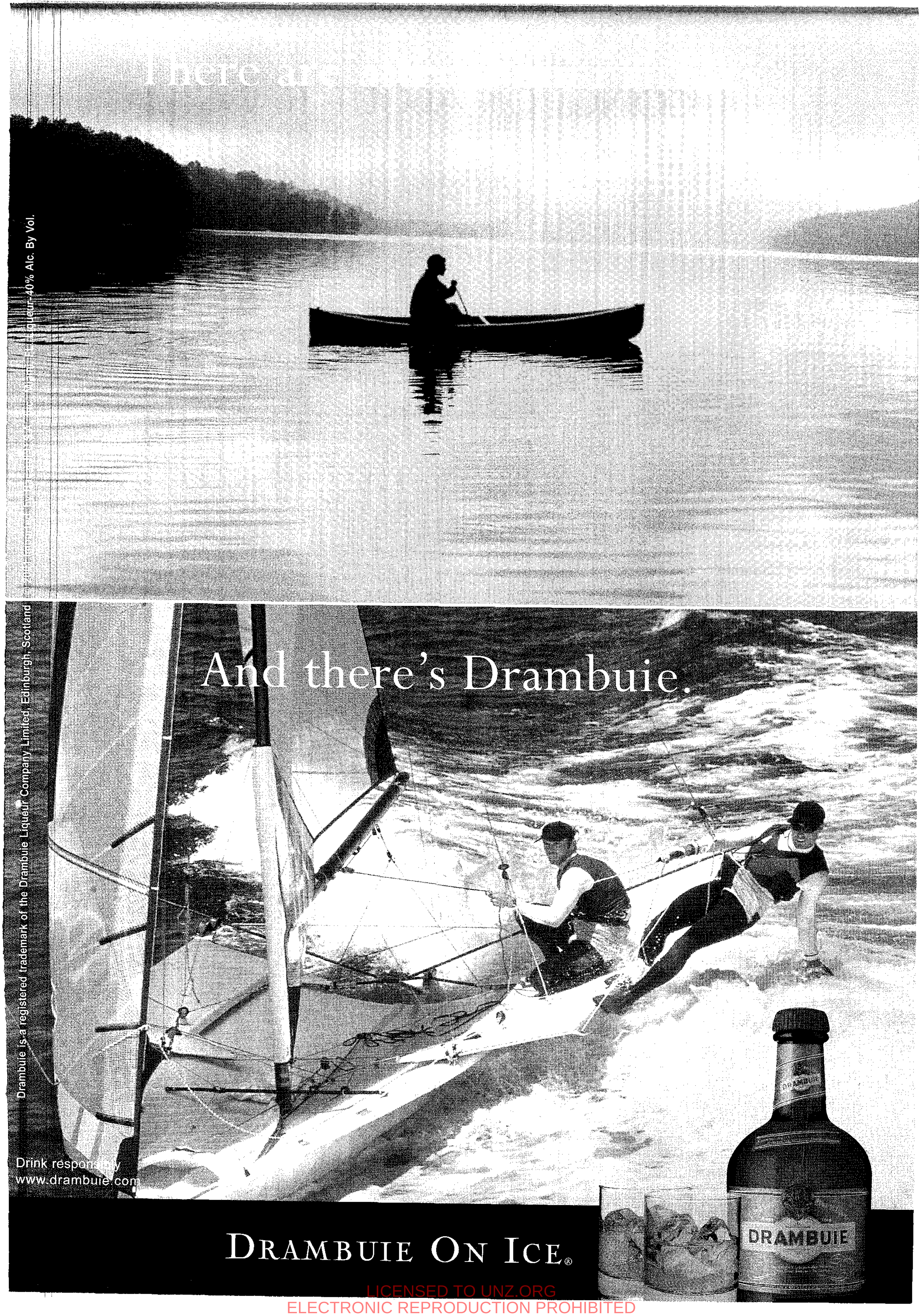
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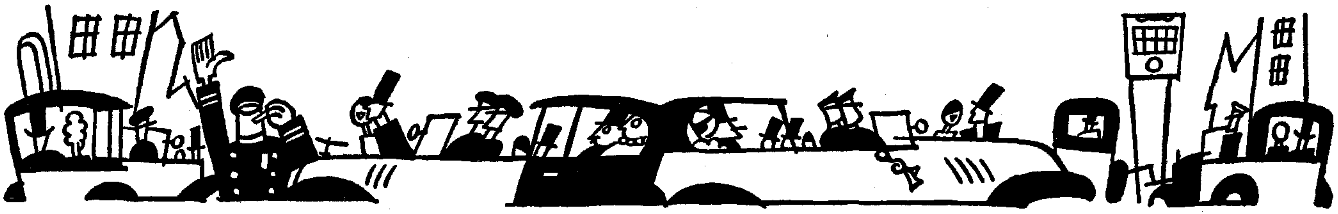
GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN



THE THEATRE
OPENINGS & PREVIEWS

Please call the phone number listed with the theatre for timetables and ticket information.

THE GLORY OF LIVING
Philip Seymour Hoffman directs a new drama by Chicago playwright Rebecca Gilman, which examines domestic violence. Preview on Nov. 14. Opens Nov. 15 at 8. (MCC, 120 W. 28th St. 206-1515.)

IPHIGENEIA AT AULIS
The Pearl Theatre Company's staging of Euripides' tragedy. In previews through Nov. 18. Opens Nov. 19 at 7. (80 St. Marks Pl. 505-3401.)

QED
The atom-bomb physicist Richard Feynman's book "Tuva or Bust!" (written with Ralph Leighton) was the inspiration for this two-character play by Peter Parnell, starring Alan Alda and Kellie Overbey. Gordon Davidson is the director. Sundays and Mondays only. Opens Nov. 18 at 8. (Vivian Beaumont, Lincoln Center. 239-6200.)

SEXAHOLIX . . . A LOVE STORY
John Leguizamo's new solo show. In previews. (Royale, 242 W. 45th St. 239-6200.)

[SIC]
Soho Rep kicks off the season with a comedy by Melissa James Gibson about a trio of aging prodigies. In previews through Nov. 18. Opens Nov. 20 at 7:30. (46 Walker St. 479-7979.)

SPEAKING IN TONGUES
A new play by Andrew Bovell (who co-wrote the film "Strictly Ballroom"), which is described as a "psychological thriller, murder mystery, and partner-swapping satire." Karen Allen and Kevin Anderson lead the cast. Mark Clements is the director. Two previews on Nov. 14. Opens Nov. 15 at 7. (Gramercy Theatre, 127 E. 23rd St. 307-4100.)

OPENED RECENTLY

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
			14	15	16	17
18	19	20				

AN ADULT EVENING OF SHEL SILVERSTEIN
Ten comic sketches by the late Shel Silverstein, some about sex, some about relationships, some about obsessional quirks. The production is polished: six charming actors are directed with pizzazz and precision by Karen Kohlhaas. But Silverstein's writing only lives up to them about half the time. The undated sketches seem as if they were written quite a while ago, and several have aged into dull irrelevance—yuppies beating up an elderly hippie for inventing "Have a nice day," for example, or a poem recited by a pair of hookers which wouldn't shock a modern thirteen-year-old. Even so, Silverstein's takes on bus stops and laundromats, among other subjects, remain very funny. (336 W. 20th St. 239-6200. Closes Nov. 25.)

BY JEEVES
There's no stopping the unrelenting bonhomie of this lame amusement by Alan Ayckbourn and Andrew Lloyd Webber, in which P. G. Wodehouse's shambolic Bertie Wooster (John Scherer), who is preparing to give a concert, discovers that his banjo has been stolen. A car is dispatched in search of a substitute, and Wooster, with the help of his ingenious, haughty factotum, Jeeves (well played by Martin Jarvis), improvises a story to keep us entertained while we wait. Wodehouse's comic world is peopled by the stick figures of privilege—chinless wonders, blowhard judges, daft flappers, philistines who go by such nicknames as Bingo, Stinker, and Stiffy. Here, his artificial merry-go-round is topped by a theatrical artificiality whose sight gags—pantomime cows, dancing trees, collapsing chairs, a cardboard car, a yellow ball for a moon—huff and puff in an attempt to stir some ripples of surprise on the still water of the story. True to form, Andrew Lloyd Webber's melodies are generic, and are reprised ad nauseam at the finale. Alan Ayckbourn, who, as the director, works manfully to whip a little fun into this listless tale, is less persuasive as a lyricist. (Reviewed in our issue of 11/12/01.) (Helen Hayes, 240 W. 44th St. 239-6200.)

THE COMPLETE WORKS OF WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE (ABRIDGED)
A revival of Adam Long, Daniel Singer, and Jess Winfield's comedy, in which three actors perform thirty-seven plays and a hundred and fifty-four sonnets in under two hours. (Century Center, 111 E. 15th St. 239-6200.)

DANCE OF DEATH
As a couple about to celebrate—if that's the right word—their twenty-fifth wedding anniversary, Helen Mirren and Ian McKellen square off in Strindberg's depiction of the blasted heath of matrimony, and they do battle magnificently. Their attacks on each other are so predictable and so regular that you laugh as often as you wince. Mirren, playing a former actress (if there is such a thing as a former actress), is droll and wicked, and McKellen, in his deep embrace of the role of an army captain who comes face to face with his own mortality, is a life force; as a presence onstage, he is the sound of two hands clapping. Directed by Sean Mathias; also with David Strathairn. (10/22/01) (Broadhurst, 235 W. 44th St. 239-6200.)

ELAINE STRITCH AT LIBERTY
The Broadway star sings songs and tells tales about her life in the theatre, in a one-woman show co-created with *The New Yorker's* theatre critic John Lahr. George Wolfe is the director. (Public, 425 Lafayette St. 260-2400.)

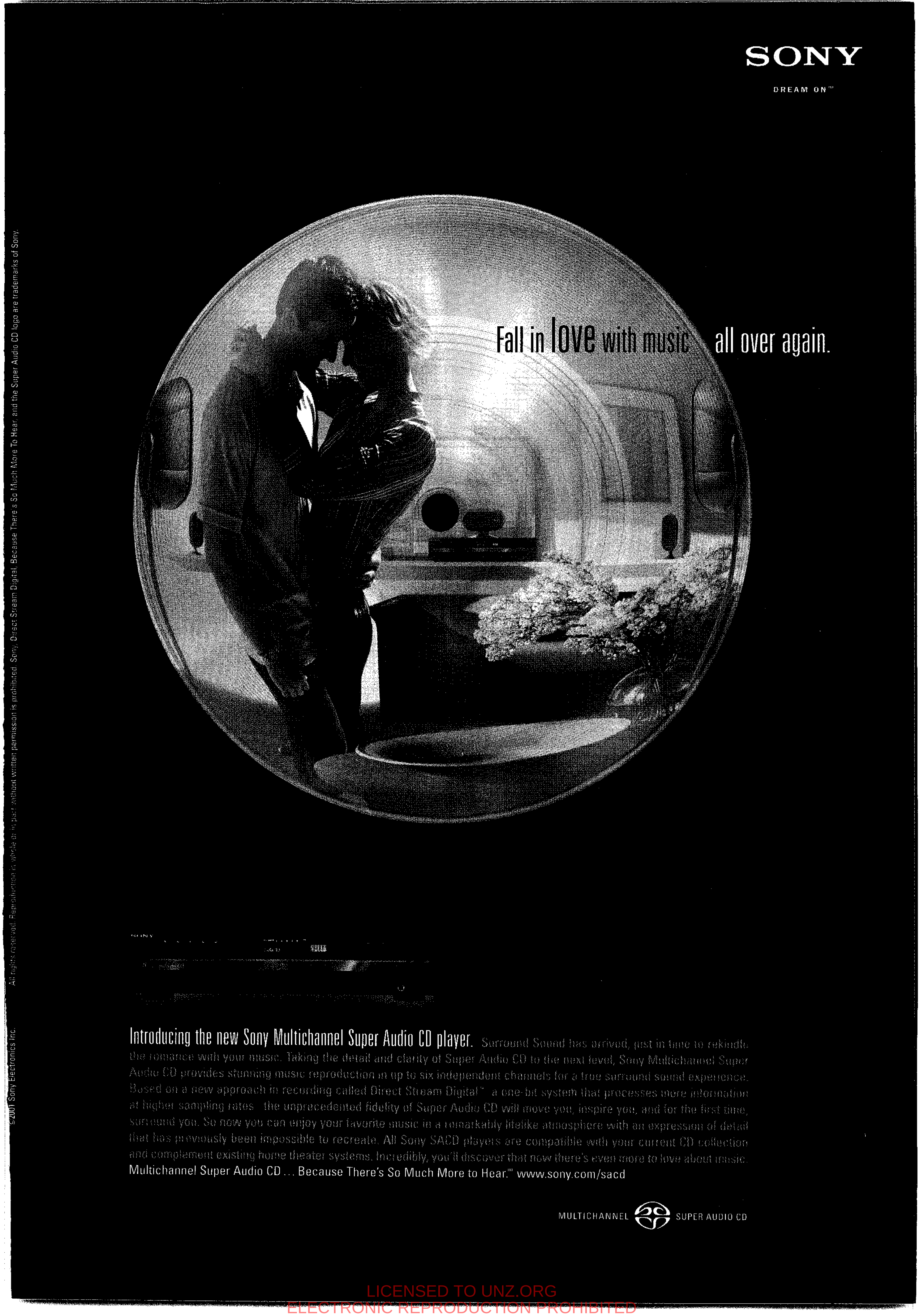
EVERETT BEEKIN
Bebe Neuwirth and Robin Bartlett lead the cast in Richard Greenberg's new play, which traces the history of a Jewish family through four generations, from New York to California. (Mitzi E. Newhouse, Lincoln Center. 239-6200.)

EVERYTHING THAT RISES MUST CONVERGE
Rather than dramatic adaptations of three Flannery O'Connor stories ("A View of the Woods," "Greenleaf," and the title tale), the director Karin Coonrod has put together staged recitations of the originally published texts. Eight actors share the burden, speaking the dialogue (including every "he said" and "she said"), divvying up and delivering the narrative passages, and executing sometimes literal, sometimes expressionistic interpretations of the action described therein. It's not a very good idea for an evening of theatre. One skillful speaker might have brought these funny, grotesque stories more affectingly alive. Or you could stay home and read them yourself. (New York Theatre Workshop, 79 E. 4th St. 239-6200. Closes Nov. 18.)

FERDYDURKE
Poland's Teatr Provisorium & Kompania Teatr performs a stage adaptation of the playwright Witold Gombrowicz's formerly banned 1937 surrealist novel about a thirty-year-old man who relives his childhood, literally. Some performances will be in Polish. (La Mama, 74A E. 4th St. For schedule information about English and Polish performances, call 475-7710. Closes Nov. 25.)

45 SECONDS FROM BROADWAY
Neil Simon's new comedy is set in the Edison Hotel coffee shop, a hangout for theatre types. Directed by Jerry Zaks. (Richard Rodgers, 226 W. 46th St. 307-4100.)

HAVANA IS WAITING
Eduardo Machado's semiautobiographical play opens as Federico (Bruce MacVittie), a writer and teacher, dreams of returning to his mother—and to mother Cuba. He's awakened by his friend Fred (Ed Vassallo), who's come to accompany him on his first trip back to his homeland since he flew away, like a Lost Boy from "Peter Pan," thirty-eight years before. In Havana, they enlist the aid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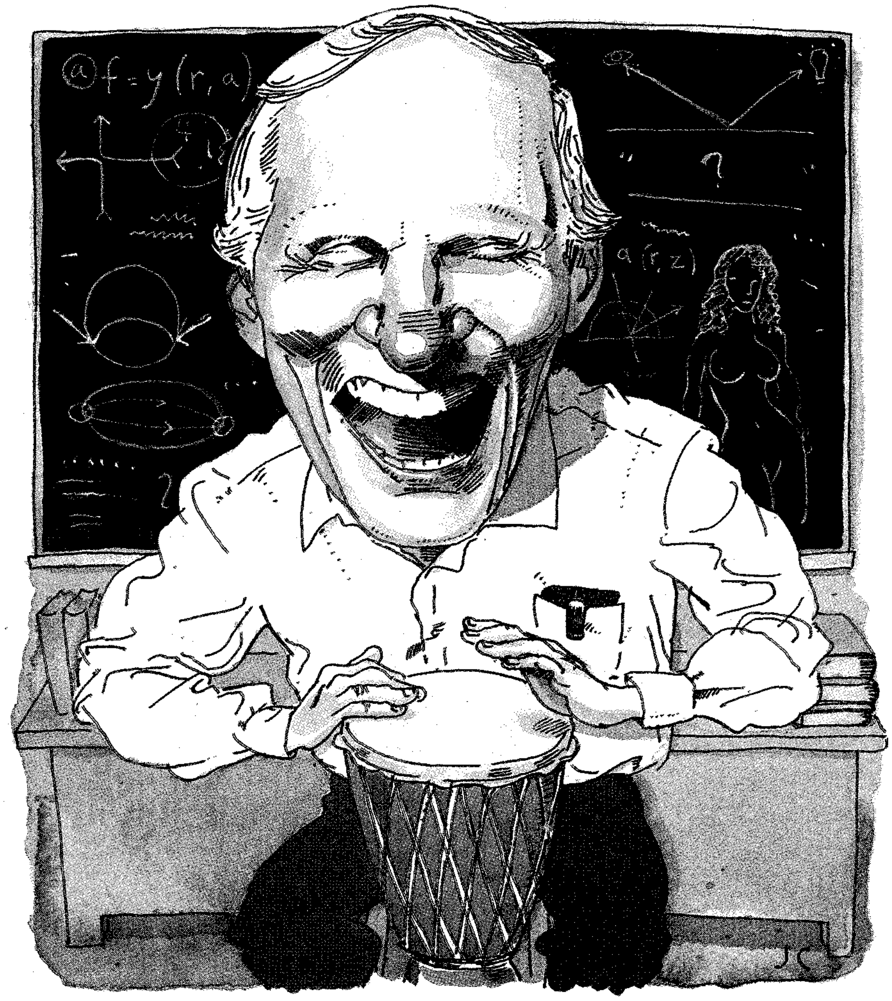


Alan Alda portrays the physicist Richard Feynman, in "QED," by Peter Parnell.

of Ernesto (Felix Solis), a cabdriver who strongly supports the Revolución but isn't above accepting the occasional bribe. Machado makes poetic use of his three characters to explore the subjects of politics, resentment, class, regret, sexual identity, and forgiveness. Directed by Michael John Garcés, the actors are fine, but the main plot point—Will Federico be permitted to enter the house he lived in as a child?—isn't much to hang a play on, and the over-all tone veers uncomfortably between the stridency of conflict and the emotionality of reconciliation. (Cherry Lane, 38 Commerce St. 239-6200.)

HEDDA GABLER
This "Hedda," starring Kate Burton and directed by Nicholas Martin, is all surface brightness—it twinkles rather than burns. Jon Robin Baitz's colloquial adaptation of Ibsen's drama leaves little room for shading or depth, and the entire cast, which includes Michael Emerson, Harris Yulin, David Lansbury, and Angela Thornton, suffers under Nicholas Martin's heavy-handed and misguided direction, as does the audience. (10/22/01) (Ambassador, 219 W. 49th St. 239-6200.)

MAMMA MIA!
This smorgasbord of song, the brainchild of Benny Andersson and Björn Ulvaeus, the male half of the seventies supergroup ABBA, is nothing but hokum—a chucklehead pleasure. Andersson and Ulvaeus have shrewdly allowed their platinum hits to be sent up by a story that pits the impudence of youth against the resilience of middle age. Catherine Johnson's book, which is simply a slick cartoon that connects the dots between ABBA's No. 1 singles, asks the question: Can twenty-year-old Sophie, the daughter of a hippie dropout who was the leader of a girl group called Donna and the Dynamos, find out which of the three men she's invited to her wedding is her real father? Though the show is cunningly directed by Phyllida Lloyd and given the proper vulgar acrylic touch by the designer Mark Thompson, the question—a multimillion-dollar McGuffin—remains unanswered. (11/5/01) (Winter Garden, Broadway at 50th St. 563-5544.)

THE MARRIAGE OF FIGARO
Once again, David Herskovits and his Target Margin Theatre triumphantly re-create a classic. In this case, it's the Beaumarchais play on which the opera was based, newly translated by "the company." The actors—all terrific—make it clear that they know they're playing a farce, and yet their pain and confusion as the plots and counterplots unfold are just as convincing as their knowing asides. And Mr. Herskovits's ability to focus all the intelligence and high energy on display makes this a vivid, funny, rich, and even relevant evening. (Ohio Theatre, 66 Wooster St. 358-3657. Closes Nov. 17.)

METAMORPHOSES
Ovid said, "All things change, nothing perishes," and Mary Zimmerman's fluid and beautiful interpretation of several legends from his fifteen-book history of the world is reassuring proof. Her modern staging, which charmingly and wittily incorporates colloquial language and costumes that range across time, confirms the enduring and elemental power of myth. Here—on a stark set composed only of a large crystal chandelier, a battered manorial door, a suspended image of sky and clouds, and an oblong, twenty-seven-foot pool—real love, thwarted, begets love in other forms; kindness is rewarded in unexpected ways; and evil often backfires. But sometimes the good are punished and the bad triumph, because even the gods in charge surrender to flawed human emotion. A tonic for anyone who needs to believe that terrible events can transform us. (Second Stage, 307 W. 43rd St. 246-4422.)

MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING
It's gimmick Shakespeare, and it really works. The accomplished Aquila Theatre Company has set the Bard's comic examination of trust, mistrust, and sharp-tongued singles destined for couplehood in London in an "Avengers"-influenced swinging sixties. The men wear bowlers and Savile Row suits, the women are smart and slinky in black vinyl. The story is advanced with the help of some go-go choreography, and "Hey Nonny Nonny" sung to a bossa-nova beat is just plain cool. What is not at all tricked up is the language, which is beautifully spoken, dramatically revealing, and crystalline in effect. (Manhattan Ensemble Theatre, 55 Mercer St. 239-6200.)

NOISES OFF
Jeremy Sams's revival of Michael Frayn's 1982 backstage comedy, a farce within an antic farce, is blissful fun. As the dysfunctional troupe of the travelling show "Nothing On," every member of the excellent cast—Patti LuPone, Peter Gallagher, Richard Easton, Faith Prince, Edward Hibbert, Katie Finneran, T. R. Knight, Thomas McCarthy, and Robin Weigert—shines in roles that lesser comedians would surely find daunting. Frayn's construction requires spot-on comic timing, and with the help of the director Jeremy Sams, this production delivers it—and then some. The laughs rumble through the audience from start to finish. (Brooks Atkinson, 256 W. 47th St. 307-4100.)

PUPPETRY OF THE PENIS
It's one thing for a man to develop the ability to stretch his scrotum until it's the size of a dinner plate, but another to share this talent with the world. These two Australians, Simon Morley and David (Friendy) Friend, call their transformations "installations" and give them such suggestive names as "Kentucky Fried Chicken," "The Windsurfer," and "A Slowly Emerging Mollusk." It's all supposed to be good, clean, nasty fun; the Aussies even profess embarrassment at the success of their "little pub show." Still, it's a con: fifteen minutes into their act they are utterly naked and out of ideas. They can't go on, but they do. (John Houseman, 450 W. 42nd St. 239-6200.)

REBEL WITHOUT A PAUSE
The performance artist Reno, in her latest show. Mondays at 8. (La Mama, 74A E. 4th St. 475-7710.)

SALEM
A play by Alex Roe, which takes off where Hawthorne's story "Young Goodman Brown" ends. (Metropolitan Playhouse, 220 E. 4th St. 995-5302. Closes Nov. 18.)

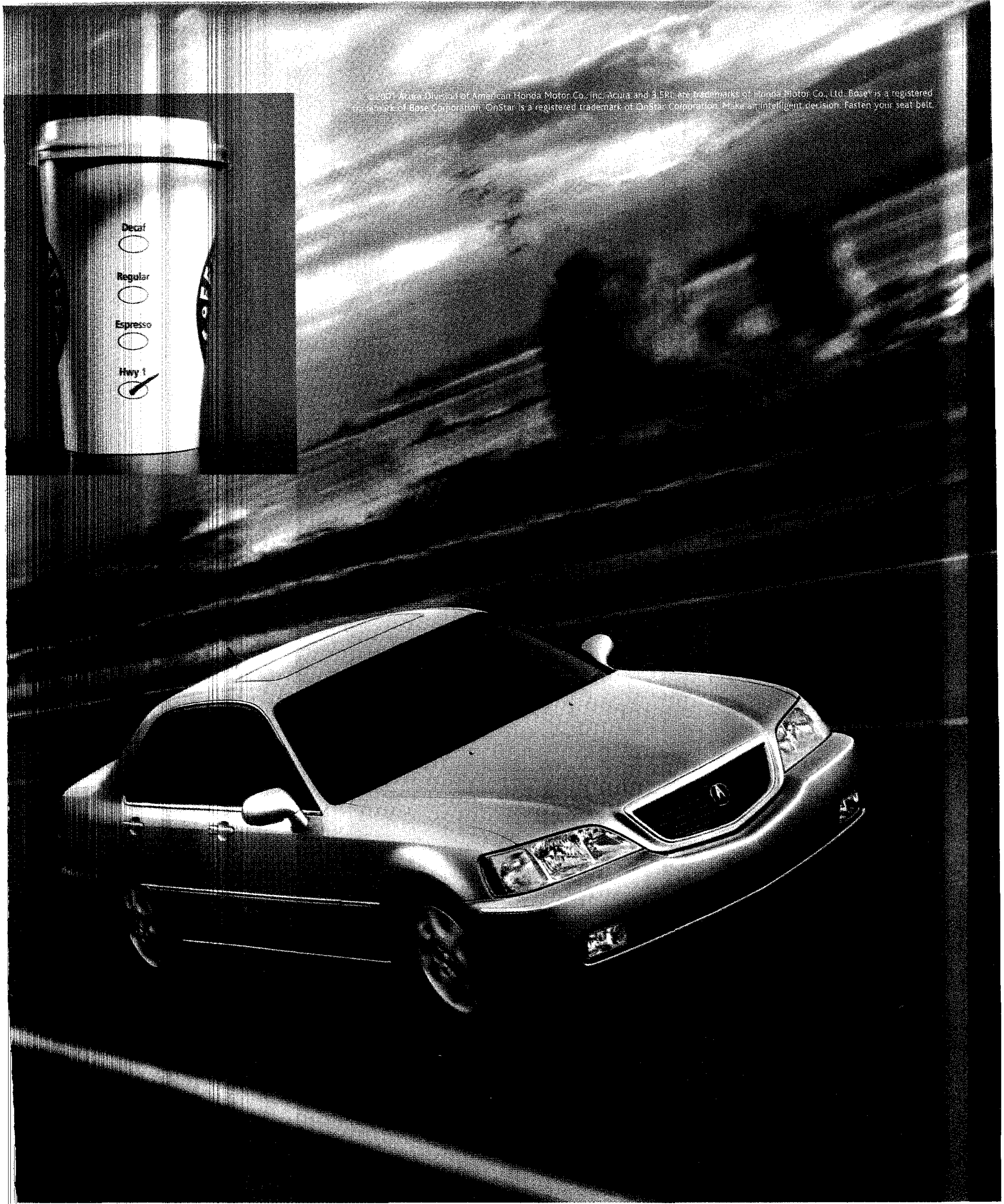
THE SHAPE OF THINGS
Gretchen Mol, Paul Rudd, Rachel Weisz, and Frederick Weller are in the cast of the Almeida Theatre Company staging of Neil LaBute's latest play. (Promenade, Broadway at 76th St. 239-6200.)

SHINY HOT NIGHTS: MORE SONGS OF JONI MITCHELL
The performance artist John Kelly stars in a follow-up to his 1997 one-man paean to the singer. Saturdays at 8. (Fez, 380 Lafayette St. 533-2680.)

SONGS OF PARADISE
From the Folksbiene Yiddish Theatre, the 1989 musical, a satirical retelling of the Book of Genesis based on Itsik Manger's Biblical poetry. (Theatre Four, 424 W. 55th St. 239-6200.)

THE SQUARE
Sixteen short plays by as many playwrights (including Craig Lucas, Mac Wellman, David Henry Hwang, and Alice Tuan) which create a collage of Asian-American life over the past century. Some of them are gems and others more like curiosities, but the evening as a whole, "curated" by the playwright Chay Yew and the director Lisa Peterson, is fascinating. The actors' versatility is impressive; among the fine, vivid cast, Henry Yuk's subtle conviction particularly stands out. Ms. Peterson's direction, a few unnecessary postmodern touches aside, gives each play its due while also placing it in a structure that accommodates its particular time period, theatrical style, emotions, and points made. (Public, 425 Lafayette St. 239-6200. Closes Nov. 18.)

THOU SHALT NOT
The psychological thriller "Thérèse Raquin" was Émile Zola's first experiment in naturalism; this ambitious musical retelling of the novel, by Susan Stroman (the director and choreographer), David Thompson (who wrote the book), and Harry



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Connick, Jr. (who wrote the music), is an experiment in Expressionism. Stroman wants dance to be the narrative engine of the musical. But, although "Thou Shalt Not" has many incidental surface pleasures, dance seems inadequate to the brooding psychology of Zola's lovers, Laurent (the strapping and charismatic Craig Bierko) and Thérèse (Kate Levering), whose needs are not so much dramatized here as announced. The show never faces the moral horror of its origins, and it refuses to embrace Zola's notion that sexual pleasure leads to brutality and destruction. At final count, we have one drowning, one stroke, one gang rape, and two suicides in a show that concludes with a ghost swinging from a lamppost marked "Bourbon" and "St. Peter." What Zola imagined as the heart's wilderness Stroman and her team re-create as a theme park of self-destruction. (11/5/01) (Plymouth, 236 W. 45th St. 239-6200.)

TICK, TICK . . . BOOM!
The title represents the late author Jonathan Larson's fear of time running out on his musical dreams. The show is set on the eve of the composer's thirtieth birthday—his Walpurgisnacht—as he is caught between the pressures to succeed and to settle. The slick, hardworking cast of three is well directed by Scott Schwartz, and, with Larson's plotline deftly reworked by David Auburn, the production has a fetching modesty and reveals Larson's idiosyncrasy, energy, and promise. (7/9/01) (Jane Street Theatre, 113 Jane St. 239-6200.)

UNDERNEATH THE LINTEL
A librarian reports mysterious findings from a book a hundred and twenty-three years overdue, in a play by Glen Berger. (Soho Playhouse, 15 Vandam St. 239-6200.)

URINETOWN
The amount of fun to be had at this musical, by Greg Kotis (book and lyrics) and Mark Hollmann (music and lyrics), is in direct proportion to the unpleasantness of its title. Its central idea is that an evil corporation controls all the toilets in a city that bears some resemblance to New York, but you don't have to rack your brains about the ramifications of that any more than the authors did; the show is really no more and no less than a terrifically spirited sendup of musicals and their conventions, as self-conscious and gag-happy as a Warner Bros. cartoon (not only does a sign saying "Secret Hideout" hang above a secret hideout; the sign has an arrow on it). John Cullum, Jeff McCarthy, Nancy Opel, and Spencer Kayden lead the uniformly wonderful cast, which is under the direction of John Rando, and John Carrafa is responsible for the clever musical staging. (10/1/01) (Henry Miller, 124 W. 43rd St. 239-6200.)

WHERE'S MY MONEY?
John Patrick Shanley's dark comedy about two bush-league divorce lawyers from Brooklyn. (Manhattan Theatre Club, at City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 581-1212.)

THE WOMEN
Scott Elliott directs a cast that includes Kristen Johnston, Rue McClanahan, Cynthia Nixon, Jennifer Tilly, Mary Louise Wilson, and Jennifer Coolidge, in Clare Boothe Luce's 1936 satire. With costumes by Isaac Mizrahi. (Reviewed in this issue.) (American Airlines Theatre, 227 W. 42nd St. 719-1300.)

WONDER OF THE WORLD
In this farcical saga of a manic faux-naïve chatterbox, Cass (the fetching and excellent Sarah Jessica Parker), who goes to Niagara Falls in search of a new life after leaving her husband of seven years, Kip (Alan Tudyk), the playwright David Lindsay-Abaire's soi-disant wacky humor offers no revelations, no admissions, no questions, only startling juxtapositions. He sets up a comic equation that he resolutely refuses to factor out, paints his characters into fantastical narrative corners, then extricates them via some implausibility that shocks the audience without enlightening it. Implausibility is piled on top of implausibility until it builds a tower of guff. The show's one incidental delight is the touching Kevin Chamberlin, who, as Captain Mike, the Niagara tour-boat guide who falls for Cass, brings a palpable sweetness and a welcome complexity to the otherwise aimless comic playing. (11/12/01) (Manhattan Theatre Club, at City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 581-1212.)

DANCE

"GIANT EMPTY"
John Jasperse's four-member troupe is the size of a perfect nuclear family, and in "Giant Empty," Jasperse's début at BAM, its happy home is coming apart at the seams. The ropes that act as walls fly outward, and the wood blocks that divide the stage into rooms topple like toys; the foursome also breaks open and falls apart. When they were making the work, Jasperse and the three other dancers talked a lot about the places we live in—how, he says, "the identity of the bathroom, kitchen, or family room is less about the physical space itself than about what we do in it." What they do in "Giant Empty" is cluster together as if on a raft in the vast sea of floor and perform simple, calming acts, like washing their hands. "But ultimately we spin off on different tangents," he says. "The dance is spacious and sad." (BAM's Harvey Theater, 651 Fulton St., Brooklyn. 718-636-4100. Nov. 14 and Nov. 16-17 at 7:30 and Nov. 18 at 3.)

JOSÉ LIMÓN DANCE COMPANY
To mark its fifty-fifth-anniversary season, the troupe performs three programs, which include repertory works, premières by Donald McKayle, Billy Siegenfeld, Murray Louis, and Doug Varone, and the revival of Doris Humphrey's "Invention," from 1949. (Joyce Theatre, 175 Eighth Ave., at

TABLES FOR TWO

LA CÔTE BASQUE
60 W. 55th Street (688-6525)—It is always a perfect spring day in this spacious, half-timbered dining room, with its striped awnings and brightly painted murals of the pretty harbor of Saint-Jean-de-Luz and a verdant woods that couldn't be better for a *déjeuner sur l'herbe*. La Côte Basque, a holdover from a time when a trip to one of the city's top French restaurants was almost as good as a trip to France, seems more inviting than ever. On a recent night, the maître d' shepherded two patrons from the reservations booth through a crowded dining room to a banquette with the imperturbable smoothness of someone for whom doing this sort of thing is not a job but a calling. One look at the grizzled waiter told you that the acting profession, for this man, has never held the slightest allure. From *les potages* to *les desserts*, the dishes on the menu registered like warm, old friends, even to a diner with schoolboy French: *bisque de homard*, *assiette de charcuterie maison*, *escargots méridionaux*, *casserole de Saint Jacques au safran*, *ris de veau sauté forestier*, *tarte tatin et sorbet au Calvados*, *crème brûlée à la Cassonade*. On that particular night, a seafood risotto with asparagus, and several quenelles in a lobster sauce, went down like food for extremely lucky babies. A crisp roast duckling in a perfectly balanced honey-and-Grand Marnier cherry sauce, and venison medallions in a sleek red-wine sauce, cast a baronial glow. A mixed-berry tart and a chocolate cake with a truffle center and white-chocolate sorbet brought a luxurious sense of completion. "Finished?" the waiter inquired when the spoons were put down. The only response, as he cleared the dishes away, was to smile and order a very good Armagnac, for old time's sake. (Open Mondays through Saturdays for lunch and dinner, Sundays for dinner only. Prix fixe $68.)

—*Charles Michener*

19th St. 242-0800. Nov. 13 at 7, Nov. 14-16 at 8, Nov. 17 at 2 and 8, and Nov. 18 at 2 and 7:30. Through Nov. 25.)

"AEROBIA"
The experimental playwright Jim Neu and the postmodern choreographer Douglas Dunn transport us to a fitness center fifteen years in the future where talking is part of the program: Aerobia is a self-help spa in which the clients work out concepts like "macrovision" and "aerobability." But the most forward-looking thing here is the two veterans' take on dance-theatre, an often tiresome form. This witty dance-play leaps over such common pitfalls as a too-literal connection between the talk and the dance or, alternately, a too-distant relation. It offers, instead, what Dunn calls "gentle, suggestive correspondences" between smart talk and quicksilver dancing. (P.S. 122, 150 First Ave., at 9th St. 477-5288. Nov. 15-18 at 8:30. Through Nov. 25.)

BEBE MILLER COMPANY
The company re-presents "Verge," a full-length quartet that experiments with touch, distance, and intimacy, performed by Ted Johnson, Darrell Jones, Angie Hauser Robinson, and Melissa Wynn. (Dance Theatre Workshop at the Duke on 42nd St, 229 W. 42nd St. 924-0077. Nov. 14-16 at 8 and Nov. 17 at 3 and 8.)

"DANCE WORKS WITH LIVE MUSIC"
The Nicola Hawkins Company cites a variety of inspirations, including early music and English Channel swimmers. (St. Mark's-In-the-Bouwerie, Second Ave. at 10th St. 674-8194. Nov. 15-18 at 8:30.)

BARNARD DANCES
Students in the university dance program perform in works by five choreographers, including Jamie Bishton ("Things That Cannot Be Painted"), Maguette Camara ("Huguette"), and Janet Soares ("Leaving"). (Miller Theatre, Broadway at 116th St. 854-7799. Nov. 15-17 at 8.)

NIGHT LIFE
CONCERTS

CAKE
Sacramento, California's No. 1 rock band returns with its new album, "Comfort Eagle," a fresh package of post-ironic songs. The witticisms, the hooks, and the charm are all there. The one thing missing is a sense of anything new. (Roseland, 239 W. 52nd St. 307-7171. Nov. 15 at 7:30.)

LOUIE BELLSON AND HIS BIG BAND
With his double bass drums thumping and his hundred-volt exuberance charging the bandstand, Bellson may be the last big-band leader to remember the days when musicianship went hand in hand with showmanship. He still looks and sounds great and informs his ensembles with invaluable knowledge learned from his old employer, Duke Ellington. (Pace Downtown Theatre, Spruce St. between Nassau and Gold Sts. 346-1715. Nov. 15 at 8.)

HARRY CONNICK, JR.
Once considered New Orleans's answer to Sinatra, Connick possesses fearsome piano chops, as well as old-school charisma. He's spread his talent around (a few ill-advised acting roles, the score of the poorly received new Broadway musical "Thou Shalt Not"), but in his live concerts, he remains a real pro. (City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 581-1212. Nov. 15-16 at 8.)

"JOSIAH MEIGS & ME: A SONG CYCLE FOR PUPPETS"
This work in progress, with music by the lachrymose Athens, Georgia, singer-songwriter Vic Chesnutt and puppetry and visuals by the filmmaker Janie Geiser, is based on the life of the first president of the University of Georgia. (Art at St. Ann's, St. Ann's Warehouse, 38 Water St., Brooklyn. 718-858-2424. Nov. 15-18 at 8.)

JIMMY BUFFETT
The man from Margaritaville. (Madison Square Garden. 307-7171. Nov. 16 at 8.)

THEY MIGHT BE GIANTS
By many measures this band is now the Led Zeppelin of "nerd rock." The unapologetically quirky

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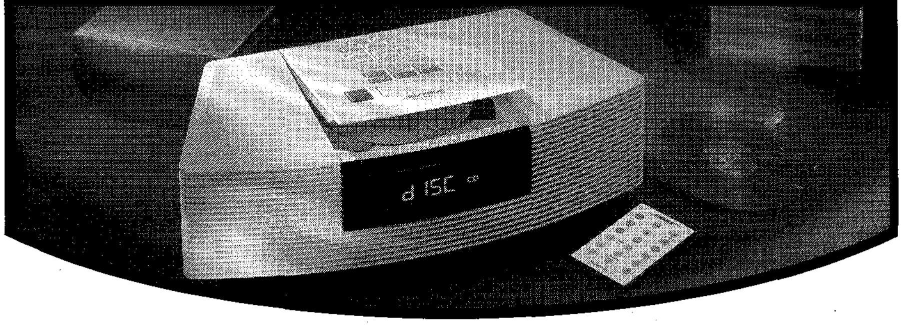

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duo of John Flansburgh and John Linnell has been making willfully clever, skewed pop since the mid-eighties. Their recent album, "Mink Car," is a return to form for the pair. It calls to mind the best of their reputation-making 1990 release, "Flood." (Town Hall, 123 W. 43rd St. 840-2824. Nov. 16 at 8.)

STEPHEN MALKMUS & THE JICKS

For most of the nineties, Malkmus fronted Pavement, perhaps the ultimate indie-rock band; their abstruse lyrics, brilliantly messy guitar-based sound, and ability to communicate whimsy, melancholy, and multiple levels of irony (usually within the same song) endeared them to college students everywhere. Last year, Pavement disbanded after five albums. Malkmus recently released a solo record, and it doesn't stray too far from home, with songs full of fractured wordplay that are either about everything or nothing. (Roxy, 515 W. 18th St. 307-7171. Nov. 16 at 8.)

JOHN HIATT

The songwriter and singer returns to the heyday of the late eighties by reuniting with his backing band the Goners, featuring the great slide guitarist Sonny Landreth, the bassist David Ranson, and the drummer Kev Blevins. They're out promoting a new album, "The Tiki Bar Is Open," and you can expect some prime-cut blues-based rock and roll. (Town Hall. Nov. 17 at 8.)

PSYCHEDELIC FURS /
ECHO & THE BUNNYMEN

Having graduated from being on the vanguard of British post-punk into soundtrack staples of various eighties-era John Hughes films, the once-celebrated Furs and Bunnymen are now cruelly relegated to the nostalgia circuit. The time has come for aging, formerly hip thirtysomethings to dig their long black raincoats out of the closet. (Beacon Theatre. Nov. 18 at 8.)

BOB DYLAN

The great troubadour seems to have dedicated his career to Emerson's quote about consistency being the hobgoblin of little minds. After cutting an acclaimed album, he has routinely returned with something less appreciated. But it turns out that Dylan is no fool. He's decided to break with the past. The follow-up to the widely praised 1997 album "Time Out of Mind," the recently released "Love and Theft," is a worthy companion. (Madison Square Garden. Nov. 19 at 7:30.)

CLUBS

Musicians and night-club proprietors live complicated lives; it's advisable to call ahead to confirm engagements.

B. B. KING BLUES CLUB & GRILL

237 W. 42nd St. (997-4144)—Nov. 17: **Hubert Sumlin,** whose sharp, scratchy guitar helped propel Howlin' Wolf's band for twenty years, celebrates his seventieth birthday, with the help of the former Band drummer and vocalist **Levon Helm,** the blues pianist **David Maxwell,** and others.

BOWERY BALLROOM

6 Delancey St. (533-2111)—Nov. 15-17: **Soulive** performs in dark suits that are as sharp as the group's Hammond-organ-driven retro jazz and funk. The trio is breaking away from its jam-band roots in a big way, with a début on Blue Note records, "Doin' Something." Nov. 18: The faux Brit pop of Vancouver's **New Pornographers.**

FEZ

380 Lafayette St. (533-7000)—Nov. 14: A night of eclectic delights with the expatriate Frenchmen of **Bébé Eiffel,** the fez-clad acoustic-jazz trio **Wild Party Sheiks,** and the tuba-and-harmonica antics of **Hazmat Modine.** The **Mingus Big Band** still packs them in every Thursday. Dining.

IRVING PLAZA

17 Irving Pl., at 15th St. (777-6800)—Nov. 17: The singer-songwriter **Dan Bern** (who also refers to himself simply as Bernstein). One of the more original performers to have infiltrated the pop scene in recent years, he's currently touring with songs from his latest album, "New American Language." Nov. 18-20: Veterans of an era when spiky green hair and dog collars attracted derision more often than record deals, California's **Social Distortion** paved the way for upstarts like Blink 182, a distinction that certainly makes them bristle.

JOE'S PUB

425 Lafayette St. (539-8777)—Nov. 14: The **Wayfaring Strangers** drift in with their folk-bluegrass-klezmer fusion. Nov. 19-20: **Sam Phillips.** Not to be confused with the man who discovered Elvis, this former Christian-music artist is simply one of the most distinctive singer-songwriters to have emerged in the past fifteen years. Her warm, dusky voice and hauntingly beautiful songs—which address spiritual matters in skeptical, three-dimensional terms—are delightful. After a decade of richly idiosyncratic arrangements crafted with her husband, the producer T-Bone Burnett (Elvis Costello, Counting Crows), Phillips has returned with her first album in five years, "Fan Dance." It is a departure for the pair. Phillips teams with the guitarist **Marc Ribot,** who will join her here for a set of sparse and clean arrangements.

MAXWELL'S

1039 Washington St., Hoboken (201-798-0406)—Nov. 15: Gritty Irish rock with the **Prodigals.** Nov. 17: The amiable Welshman **Mike Peters,** who once led the band of folksy punks with high hair and a U2-esque penchant for earnest sloganeering known as the Alarm.

VILLAGE UNDERGROUND

130 W. 3rd St. (777-7745)—Nov. 17: **Tony Joe White,** the swamp-rocking author of "Polk Salad Annie," "Rainy Night in Georgia," and countless other hits.

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

ALGONQUIN HOTEL

59 W. 44th St. (840-6800)—Through Dec. 1: The vocalist **Paula West** has a winning combination of Nancy Wilson-like élan, easy swing, and mountain-spring diction. Her show features a repertoire that jaunts easily from standards and offbeat show tunes to a dual reading (by alternating verses) of "Night in Tunisia" and "Caravan." She's backed by a handpicked trio featuring the pianist **Bill Charlap,** the drummer **Victor Lewis,** and the bassist **Ray Drummond.** Dining.

BIRDLAND

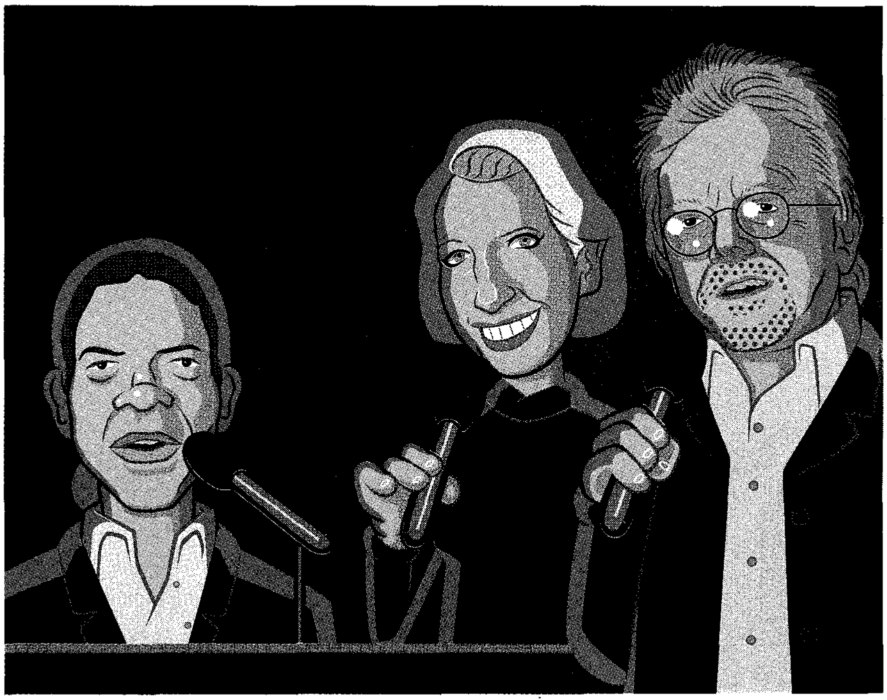
315 W. 44th St. (581-3080)—Nov. 14-17: **Ron Carter** may be the world's most famous jazz bassist, but being a perennial gun for hire has never been enough for him. A fine composer and a crafty bandleader—the nucleus of the celebrated band Sphere was once his rhythm section—Carter is leading a nonet, which should provide him with all the tonal coloring he needs to present his case as a significant artist. Dining.

BLUE NOTE

131 W. 3rd St., near Sixth Ave. (475-8592)—Through Nov. 18: The **Paquito D'Rivera** quintet. The saxophonist D'Rivera was blowing hot Cuban jazz long before it became the world-music *sabor del mes.*

FEINSTEIN'S AT THE REGENCY

540 Park Ave., at 61st St. (339-4095)—Nov. 7-24: **Jimmy Webb** and **Paul Williams** are two wonderful songwriters who kept the larders of pop music full during the sixties and seventies. Williams, who also acts—he's the star of Brian DePalma's not quite classic 1974 film "Phantom of the Paradise"—may have a slightly higher profile, but Webb has written hits for everyone from the Fifth Dimension and Richard Harris to Glen Campbell and Art Garfunkel. Each is an engaging performer who does credit to his most durable material—"We've Only Just Begun" and "Rainbow Connection," in Williams's case; "Up, Up and Away," "By the Time I Get to Phoenix," and the gloriously inscrutable "MacArthur Park," in Webb's. The singing actress **Liz Callaway** joins them for this engagement. Dining.



Jimmy Webb, Liz Callaway, and Paul Williams, at Feinstein's at the Regency.

MICHAEL WELDON

IRIDIUM

1650 Broadway, at 51st St. (582-2121)—Through Nov. 18: The **Ahmad Jamal** trio. Instead of mellowing with time, Jamal gets more eccentric. A charming minimalist back in the fifties, the pianist has metamorphosed into a verbose extrovert with his own game plan of stop-and-start rhythms, mood swings, and catch-me-if-you-can shenanigans with his sidemen. Mondays belong to the electric-guitar innovator **Les Paul.**

UP OVER JAZZ CAFÉ

351 Flatbush Ave., at Seventh Ave., Brooklyn (718-398-5413)—Nov. 16-17: The **Hamiet Bluiett** quartet. The fact that Bluiett plays the bottom-end baritone saxophone has never stopped him from extracting high-altitude notes that even a soprano saxophone might have trouble reaching. A mainstay of the World Saxophone Quartet, this edgy improviser roots his explorations and subterranean-to-stratospheric tonal digressions in the bedrock of blues and gospel.

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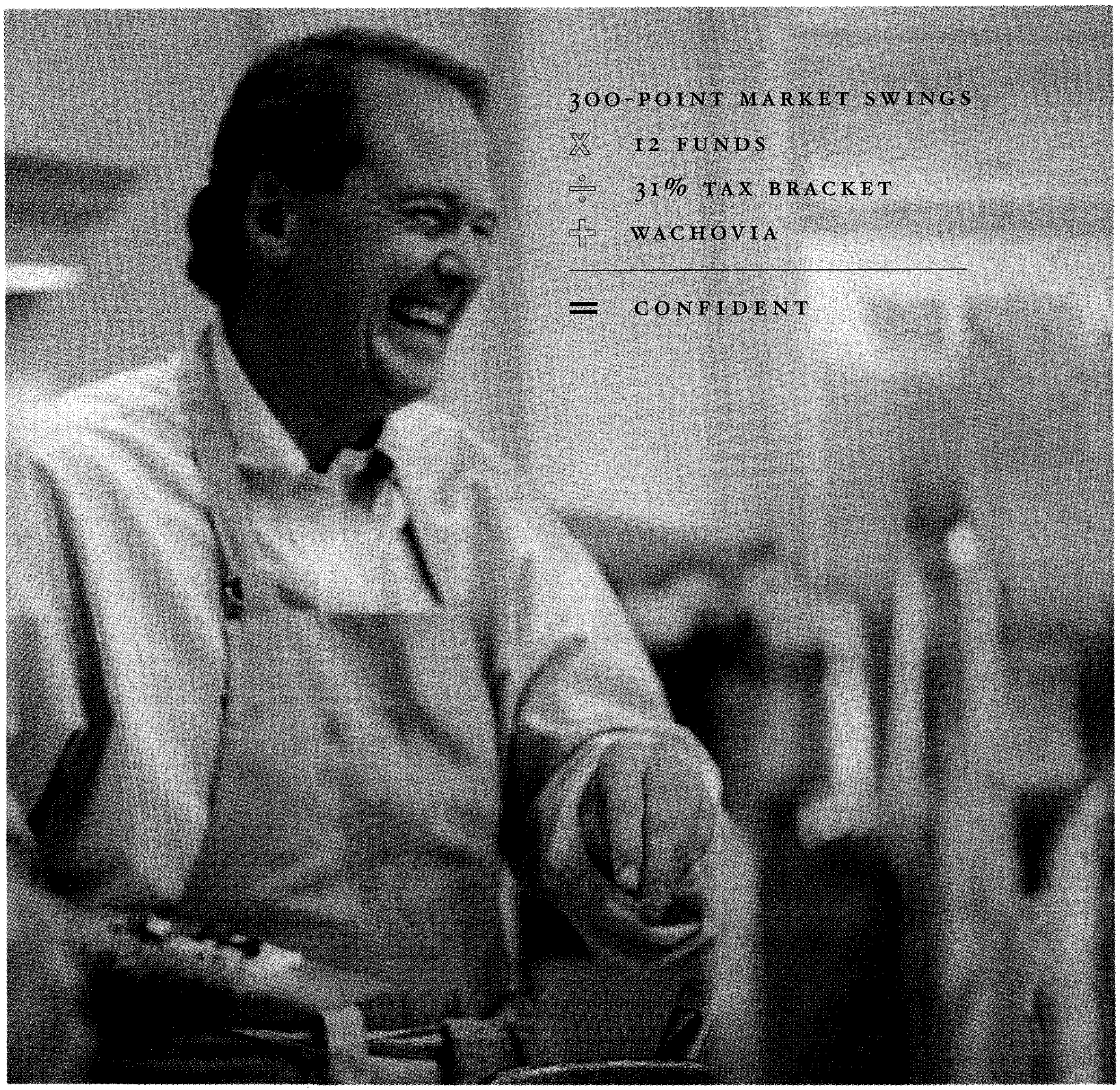
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VILLAGE VANGUARD
178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (255-4037)—Through Nov. 18: The **Tom Harrell** sextet. He can be the most biting, questing trumpeter out there when he roams the dark, Mingus-toned terrain that brings out the visionary in him. But when he wanders off to the faux-tropical zone that he's also fond of, Harrell can be as soporific as a smooth-jazz journeyman. It's frustrating, but the highs are worth the wait. The **Vanguard Jazz Orchestra** holds sway on Mondays.

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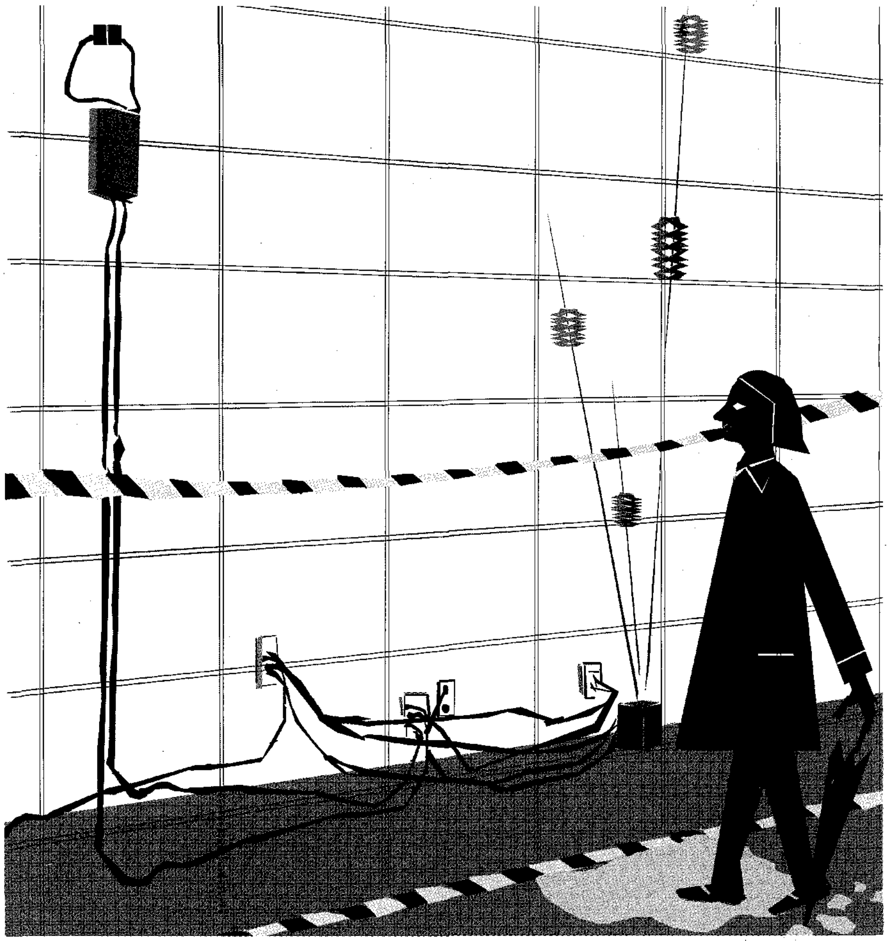
MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. (879-5500)—Some artists were not meant for retrospectives. In the case of Paul Signac (1863-1935), an acolyte and understudy of Georges Seurat, faint praise would have been more flattering. The young Signac, a determined avant-gardist of middling talent, hitched himself to Seurat's star in 1884. From then on, he served as cheerleader for their willfully formulaic style. Signac's own Pointillist efforts, especially the placid harbor scenes of the eighteen-nineties, have an appealing kind of stippled, calming brightness. But the artist's twin passions (he was an avid yachtsman and a sentimental anarchist) don't resonate much today, and the later paintings show him gradually growing tired of the method he had done so much to promote. Through Dec. 30. ♦ **"Pieter Bruegel the Elder, Drawings and Prints."** Fifty of Bruegel's sixty-one known drawings, many of them paired with the engravings (by other talented hands) for which they were designs, range from acutely poetic landscapes to surreal fantasies that were influenced by Hieronymus Bosch. While taking the dimmest possible view of human character, he embraced raw human energy with a zest that feels all-forgiving. His landscapes comprehend the grandeur and the scraggliness of nature in equal measure. Through Dec. 2. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:30, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 9.)

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
11 W. 53rd St. (708-9480)—An Alberto Giacometti retrospective reacquaints us with the Swiss sculptor's iconic skinny statues while emphasizing his paintings and his less esteemed Surrealist objects of the nineteen-thirties. Revision is not achieved. Except for "The Palace at 4 A.M." and "Woman with Her Throat Cut"—two 1932 marvels that bespeak bolt-from-the-blue inspiration like that of Coleridge's "Kubla Khan"—the objects show Giacometti in a weakly pandering mode. The paintings, mostly portraits from the nineteen-fifties, expend obsessive energy to visually skimpy ends. But the great statues are more engaging than ever. These tragicomic presences don't so much stand in the world as stand up to it, ravaged by the very space around them but maintaining vestigial subjectivity in the thrust of a chin, the tilt of a hip, and the set of a shoulder—calling to the heart. Through Jan. 8. (Open Saturdays through Tuesdays, and Thursdays, 10:30 to 5:45; Fridays, 10:30 to 8:15.)

GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (423-3500)—For **"Brazil: Body & Soul"** the Thomas Krens team has gone to new extremes, utterly transforming the museum and leaving one awed by the mega-exhibition's scope, design, audacity, and cost. Under the direction of Jean Nouvel, the entire interior has been painted black, and the rotunda is now a Stygian theatre, with a massive baroque altarpiece in its center. From there, viewers ascend past ranks of polychromed Madonnas, carved lions, ex-votos, and tribal videos and arrive, finally, at a celestial ring of white rooms, where the baroque (which lasted nearly three centuries in Brazil) abruptly gives way to modernism. After so much blood and gold, the twentieth century's primary colors are both a relief and a disappoint-



Keith Sonnier's electrified sculptures, at Location One.

ment (the change is like stepping from purgatory to preschool). In both sections, masterpieces are scarce: judging by this survey, Brazilians, like Guggenheim curators, prefer spectacle to refinement. Through Jan. 27. (Open Sundays through Wednesdays, 9 to 6; Fridays and Saturdays, 9 to 8.)

WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART
Madison Ave. at 75th St. (570-3676)—**"Into the Light: The Projected Image in American Art, 1964-1977."** When the first movie theatres were built in Japan, the seats were installed sidewise, because architects were sure the beam of light streaming from the projector would be as exciting to watch as the image onscreen. This historical survey explores a similar impulse in American art, focussing on early experimentation with film projections, as well as with sound, live video feeds, and holography. The curator Chrissie Iles knows that today's audience equates projection with the MTV glamour of Doug Aitken or Sam Taylor-Wood, which may be why she opens with a Warhol split-screen projection of Edie Sedgwick that has the opulent banality of Buñuel. But the double Edie gives way to a double Dan Graham (the two-part projection "Helix/Spiral"), and from that point the emphasis is on projection as radical experiment rather than high-gloss entertainment. Through Jan. 6. (Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, and weekends, 11 to 6, Fridays, 1 to 9.)

BROOKLYN MUSEUM OF ART
Eastern Parkway (718-638-5000)—Slinkies and Tupperware share equal billing with Pollock and Calder in **"Vital Forms: American Art and Design in the Atomic Age, 1940-1960,"** an innovative show dedicated to organic forms in art and design in the mid-twentieth century. In the main gallery, the objects are grouped by affinity rather than medium, so an Ellsworth Kelly painting in biomorphic black and blue hangs above a white Noguchi sofa and near a pair of Charles James ball gowns. In one of the show's most arresting moments, a photograph of a post-atomic mushroom cloud is installed near a Barnett Newman painting from 1946 titled "Pagan Void," its gaping center a wrenching Rorschach of anxiety. Through Jan. 6. ♦ **"Wit and Wine: A New Look at Ancient Iranian Ceramics from the Arthur M. Sackler Foundation"** presents vessels, primarily for wine, many shaped like animals or painted with their likenesses. Through Dec. 30. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, 10 to 5; Saturdays and Sundays, 11 to 6.)

DIA CENTER FOR THE ARTS
548 W. 22nd St. (989-5566)—Roni Horn titled a recent show "Making Being Here Enough," which sums up the considerable gift of her art; your experience of a given piece and its meaning are inseparable. Of the three photographic projects and two sculptures on view, the sculptures steal the show. A pair of glass blocks, one crystal clear, the other like black ice, are installed in separate galleries. Each appears uncannily liquid, as if melting in sunlight. Duality strikes again at the entrance to the show, with two groups of nearly identical portraits of the same young girl. As she gazes straight at you, a chameleon changing from picture to picture yet always herself, your sense of identity itself dissolves. Through Feb. 17. (Open Wednesdays through Sundays, noon to 6.)

JAPAN SOCIETY
333 E. 47th St. (832-1155)—The first three sections of **"Traditional Japanese Design: Five Tastes"** are so similar that it is hard to tell where one ends and another begins. *Kodai no bi* ("ancient times"), *sobuku* ("artless simplicity"), and *wabi* ("Zen austerity") are all represented by simple, largely neutral-toned pots, teapots, and accessories that differ more in their history and ascending levels of intellectual refinement than in any design characteristics. The first dramatic visual break comes with *karei* ("gorgeous splendor"), the decorative aesthetic of the noble warrior élite, who tended toward heavily patterned fabrics and mixed metals. One elaborate suit of armor includes a mask molded to the shape of a face, its screaming mouth lined with a bristly white mustache and tiny goatee. Next door, the coquettish, urban *iki* ("Edo

KIM DEMARCO

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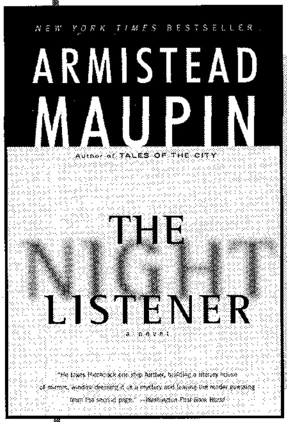

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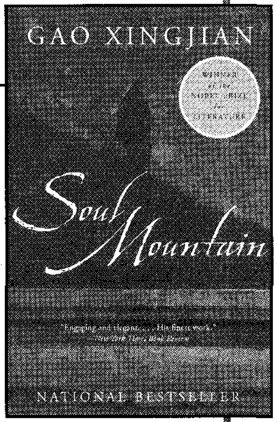

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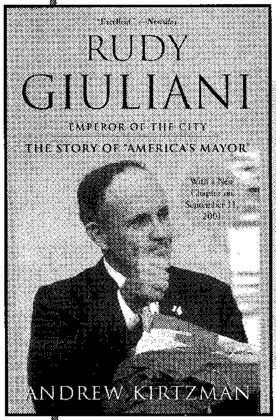

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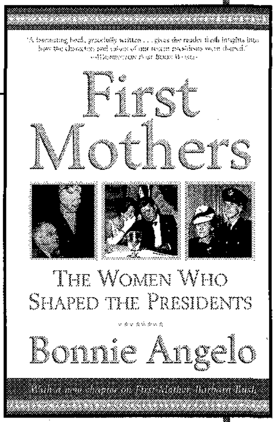

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chic") may feel most familiar to New Yorkers. It combines aspects of the others, disguising and scrambling the trappings of wealth by, for instance, hiding luxurious materials inside plain garments. The small tobacco pouches and inro boxes here would be at home on the arm of many a downtown geisha. Through Jan. 6. (Open Tuesdays through Fridays, 11 to 6; Saturdays and Sundays, 11 to 5.)

GALLERIES–UPTOWN

Unless otherwise noted, galleries are open Tuesdays through Saturdays, from around 10 or 11 to between 5 and 6.

DAVID BATES

The Texan artist has been arranging flowers lately: big, brawny blossoms that wreak amiable havoc with the delicate expectations of the still-life. The centerpiece here is a jagged, bronze sunflower of pro-basketball-player dimensions (the individual buds splay open eagerly, like hands expecting a pass). But even the smaller sculptures, paintings, and painted reliefs feel oversized and volatile. Bates's retro-modernist style has plenty of precedents, from Hartley to Beckmann (whose "Man with a Snake" may have inspired a sculpture here). But he invests them with an inflection of his own: a kind of jubilant heavy-handedness. Through Dec. 8. (DC Moore, 724 Fifth Ave., at 57th St. 247-2111.)

VALDIRLEI DIAS NUNES

This charming Brazilian artist has cleared the bric-a-brac away from his still-life setups and started painting what's left: just tables. The result is a wry, Magrittean minimalism. Each of more than twenty small panels depicts a plywood structure sitting forlornly amid surrounding whiteness, as though waiting for the fruits and plates and pitchers to return. The formulaic do-it-yourself premise could easily turn coy, but Dias Nunes paints these little modest soapboxy structures with winning delicacy. Through Nov. 24. (Ramis Barquet, 41 E. 57th St. 644-9090.)

MARK ROTHKO

Back when he was still Marcus Rothkowitz, and hadn't yet dreamed up his Dutch-door variant of Abstract Expressionism, Rothko was a painter of fractured mythological allegories. A selection of these early works, from the estate of his first wife, looks surprisingly rich, if uneven. Paintings like "In Limbo" and "Crucifix," with their farrago of limbs and eyes and mail slots, caused what Rothko called "a bedlam of hysteria" among critics in the early forties. Today they look weirdly contemporary—almost eerily close, above all, to the recent introspective musings of Jasper Johns. Through Dec. 1. (Washburn, 20 W. 57th St. 397-6780.)

ROBERT SMITHSON

Most people use maps to establish their location, but Smithson, best known for the monumental "Spiral Jetty," installed in the Great Salt Lake, used his for dislocation. He dubbed his indoor (as opposed to site-specific) sculptures "nonsites" and "displacements," and two of these are installed here, along with a series of map-based drawings and photographs. The show's centerpiece is a displacement from 1970, a long mound of shell-filled sand studded with mirrors which runs the length of the gallery. The map works lining the surrounding walls have been slyly altered by folding, cutting, and splicing, so that the Pine Barrens of New Jersey suddenly sport a portion of the Middle East. Through Nov. 24. (James Cohan, 41 W. 57th St. 755-7171.)

"NAKED SINCE 1950"

A munificent mosh pit of a show convenes images of unclothedness by forty celebrated artists, from Hopper and Picasso to Goldin and Currin. The over-all effect is unpleasant and very exciting. (Bring a friend to chatter with.) The show's orchestrated clash of strong works—contending over the bare body like predators over prey—withers the analytic impulse. Forget Sir Kenneth Clark's elegant worrying about "naked" vs. "nude"; think "stark." High points include Lucian Freud's lush and pitiless "Naked Portrait with Green Chair"; a lugubrious family of nudists photographed by Diane Arbus; Eric Fischl's well-known painting "The Old Man's Boat and the Old Man's Dog," at nineteen years old, a grownup classic; and a wax sculpture of buttocks with real hair and painted musical bars by Robert Gober. Some matchups amaze. A magenta girlie girl by Lisa Yuskavage holds its own on a wall with Picasso and de Kooning. Through Dec. 8. (C&M Arts, 45 E. 78th St. 861-0020.)

Short List

ANDY FRIEDMAN

Gotham, 41 W. 47th St. 719-4476.
Through Nov. 21.

ROY LICHTENSTEIN

Mitchell-Innes & Nash, 1018 Madison Ave.,
at 78th St. 744-7400. Through Jan. 12.

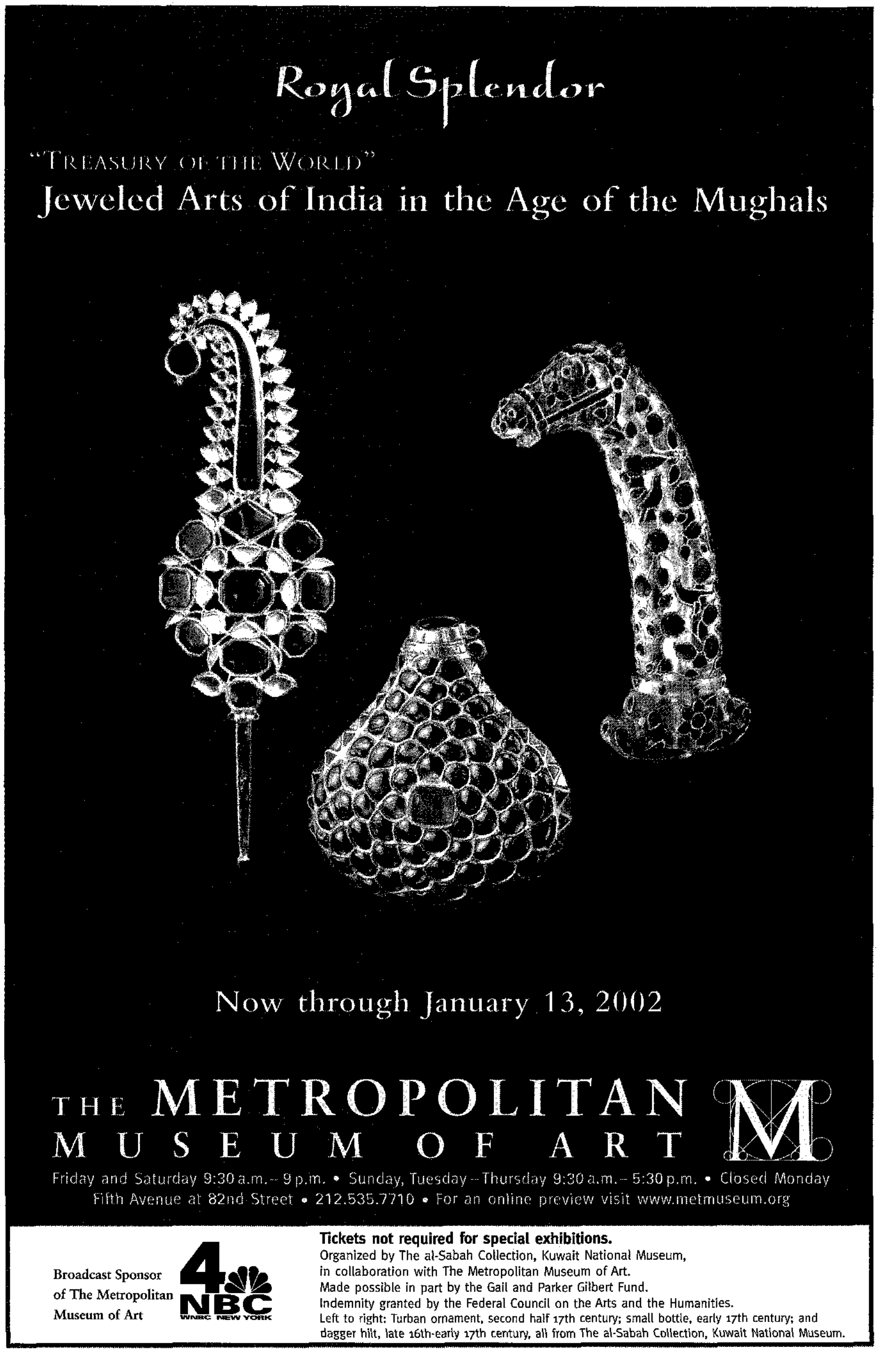
GALLERIES–CHELSEA

MARCO BRAMBILLA

In earlier video works, Brambilla proved himself one of the medium's most promising talents. These three projects are more mixed. Only "Wall of Death" showcases Brambilla's shrewd, disciplined lyricism. Filmed in England, where motorcycle stunt circuses are legal, it features a rider zooming around the inside of a cylindrical drum. Held aloft by centrifugal force, he rises higher and higher on the curving vertical walls and finally raises his hands from the handlebars. In the parting image, we see him alone, happy, enjoying his fraction of a second of triumph. Through Dec. 8. (Urbach, 526 W. 26th St. 627-0974.)

JOHN CURRIN

Currin continues his delicately weird reanimation of archaic styles in a show of highly varied paintings and drawings, mostly of women's heads and



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Left to right: Turban ornament, second half 17th century; small bottle, early 17th century; and dagger hilt, late 16th-early 17th century, all from The al-Sabah Collection, Kuwait National Museum.

with notably strong still-life elements. Those themes double up in the picture of a woman who sports a chapeau of fresh fish. Currin appears to be searching but hardly struggling, in transition from his recent Cranachlike nudes. The show's one painting in that mode is foreshortened in reverse perspective: a huge face leers at us from behind tiny feet. Like an art-history Pentecostal, Currin speaks in tongues that include early-Renaissance gravitas and rococo froufrou, sometimes simultaneously. In a startling departure, two somewhat more modern-looking, hushed interiors suggest Fairfield Porter after midnight. Through Dec. 15. (Rosen, 525 W. 24th St. 627-6000.)

RICHARD DUPONT
There's something very satisfying about Dupont's signature collages, in which a photograph is reconstructed from strips, some of which are duplicated to lengthen a tall man or widen a plump woman; the technique multiplies a subject's essence. The sculptures beside them, faithful models of Wilhelm Reich's Orgone Accumulator and Orgone Shooter, claim to do the same to real people: Reich said they could "collect, accumulate, and make available" life energy, or Orgone Energy, which the mystical scientist believed was the same shade of blue as the sky. If only it were so easy—Reich died in jail for defying an injunction to stop selling his devices. Through Nov. 24. (Golden, 526 W. 26th St. 727-8304.)

JENNY HOLZER
Who's afraid of red, yellow, and blue? Not Jenny Holzer, who inaugurates Cheim & Read's new space with three primary-colored L.E.D. sculptures so well married to the architecture that it's hard to accept their impermanence. In the front room, four narrow stainless-steel spikes rise to a height of more than twenty-four feet, spouting blue text of the discomforting variety for which the artist is best known. The next two rooms are empty of objects, with signage installed in the ceiling. Through Nov. 17. (547 W. 25th St. 242-7727.)

DANIEL PFLUMM
Cross a club kid with a cultural critic and you get some idea of this minimalist mix master's art. Pflumm has run two successful night clubs in his native Berlin, which accounts for the throbbing soundtrack of his latest video (produced by the d.j.s Mo and Kotai). The piece combines footage from previous films (shot in the anonymous environments of airports, malls, and corporate offices) with appropriated automobile ads and, most evocatively, a string of logos from Pepsi to Rolex to Fox. Stripped of their context these pared-down shapes shift from corporate identities to the cartoon equivalent of a Judd stack or Flavin bulb. Through Nov. 24. (Greene Naftali, 526 W. 26th St. 463-7770.)

Short List

JEREMY BLAKE
Feigen, 535 W. 20th St. 929-0500.
Through Nov. 24.

ELIZABETH PEYTON
Gavin Brown's Enterprise, 436 W. 15th St.
627-5258. Through Nov. 17.

RICHARD SERRA
Gagosian, 555 W. 24th St. 741-1111.
Through Dec. 15.

GALLERIES–DOWNTOWN

SANDY SKOGLUND
In Skoglund's earlier works, brightly colored cats wandered across stage sets, butterflies quivered on walls, and cheese puffs and jelly beans paved every prop; now winter (in the form of stale popcorn) has fallen. A photograph accompanying the installation shows a performance version of the work, with an elderly East Asian man sitting placidly among the drifts beside two popcorn-covered mannequins at a pink fire of popcorn-covered wood; behind him, a young man carries a young woman closer as a popcorn-covered wolf approaches. In the gallery reconstruction here, only

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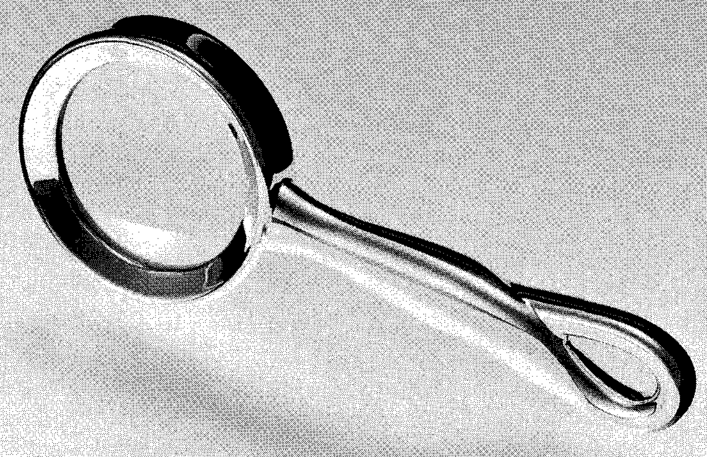

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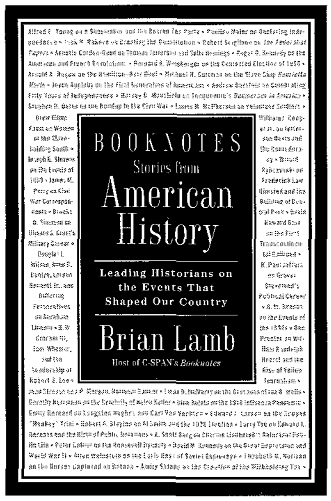

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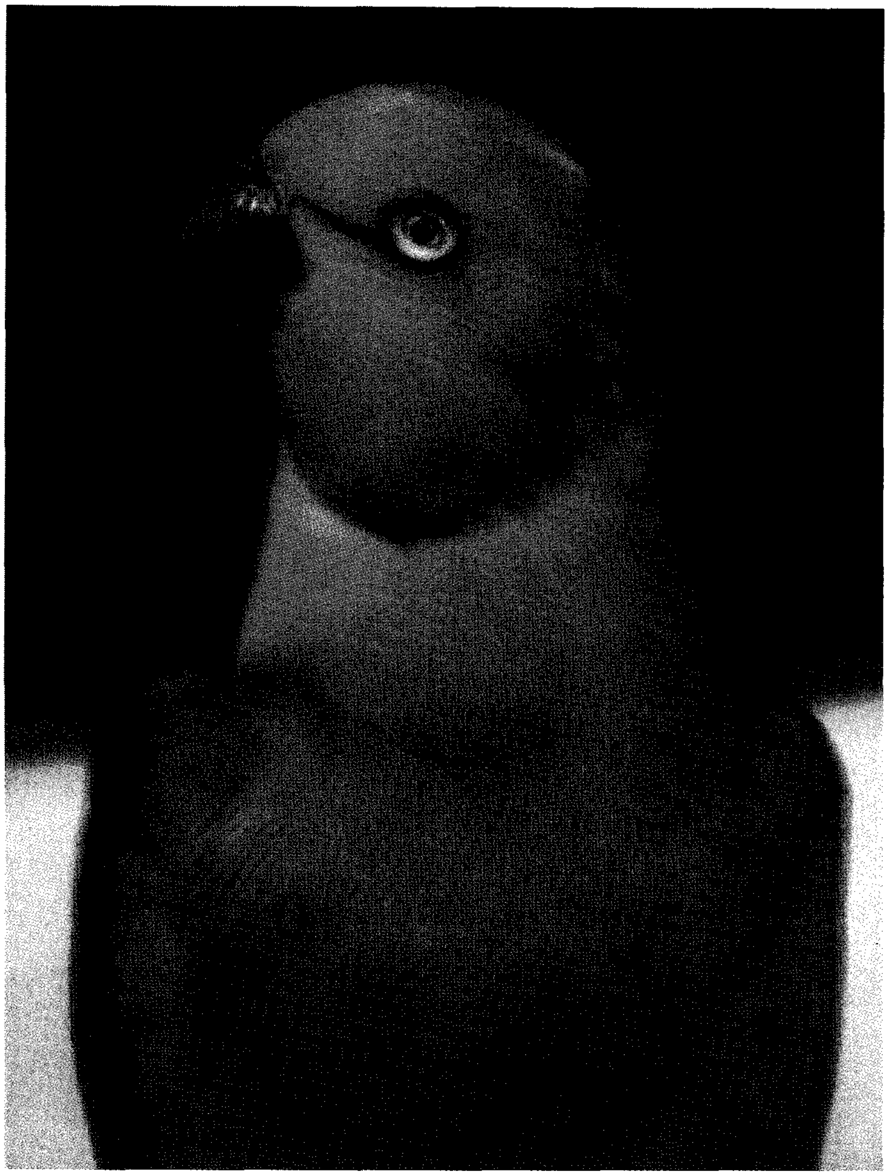


Sarah Moon's fashion-influenced photography takes in brightly colored birds along with well-dressed humans. "Coïncidences" is on show at Greenberg.

the mannequins and the wolf survive, alone with the fire. Despite the show's lack of color and verve, wondering who is whose hallucination is as pleasantly puzzling as ever. Through Nov. 24. (Borden, 560 Broadway. 431-0166.)

KEITH SONNIER
Forget about naked Last Suppers and cross-sectioned cows: here's a show that takes shock value literally. Raw electrical current flows through sculptures inspired by the work of Nikola Tesla, a pioneer of high-voltage electricity, who died in destitute obscurity. In addition to an electrified fence (the grid has never looked more menacing), the show includes a "ladder" of electrical currents bouncing between a pair of copper rods. Black-and-yellow hazard tape keeps viewers out of harm's way, but the ear-splitting and heart-stopping crackle of voltage keeps the danger palpable. Through Nov. 28. (Location One, 26 Greene St. 334-3347.)

GLORIA VANDERBILT
Apparently, the inventor of designer jeans (her name is a registered trademark) has been hanging out on Utopia Parkway, the birthplace of Joseph Cornell. Her show (the second in the gallery) consists of Plexiglas boxes filled with flea-market finds, heavy on the baby dolls and glitter. (Vanderbilt seems to favor what Cornell called "the Max Ernst white magic side" of Surrealism). The boxes fare best when the objets trouvés are left to their own devices—a stack of yellowed letters bound together with twine or a handful of corkscrew curls tied in tattered ribbons. Through Dec. 15. (K.S. Art, 73 Leonard St. 219-9918.)

Short List

ANDREA ZITTEL
Inglett, 100 Wooster St. 343-0573.
Through Dec. 15.

AUCTIONS AND ANTIQUES

SOTHEBY'S
Nov. 14 at 7: The first of three sessions devoted to contemporary art begins with thirty-one works from the collection of Douglas S. Cramer, including works by Brice Marden, Jasper Johns, Roy Lichtenstein ("Swimming Figure with Mirror," from 1977), Frank Stella, and others. Part I of the various-owners sale begins immediately following the Cramer lots. Along with paintings and sculpture by Rothko, Warhol ("Colored Liz" from 1963, estimated to sell for up to five million dollars), Judd, and others, it features a small group of German works from the collection of Ulla and Heiner Pietzsch, by such artists as Anselm Kiefer, Gerhard Richter, and Sigmar Polke. ♦ Nov. 15 at 10:15 A.M. and 2: Part II of the sale. ♦ Nov. 16 at 10:15 A.M. and 2: The medical library of Dr. Meyer Friedman, one of the leading cardiologists of the twentieth century. The highlight of the collection is William Harvey's "Exercitatio Anatomica de Motu Cordis" (from 1628), which announced the discovery of blood circulation. ♦ Nov. 16 at 10:15 A.M. and 2: Tribal art from Africa and Oceania. ♦ Nov. 17 at 10:15 A.M. and 2: Fine wine, including twenty years of vintages from the vineyards of Opus One. ♦ Nov. 20 at 7 and Nov. 21 at 10:15 A.M.: Latin-American art works, including paintings and sculpture by Tamayo, Matta, Bravo, and Cárdenas. (York Ave. at 72nd St. 606-7000.)

CHRISTIE'S
Nov. 15 at 7: Contemporary art works. Among the highlights of the evening sale are works by Felix Gonzalez-Torres, Alex Katz, and Jeff Koons. Fifteen German photographs from the Hans Grothe collection (including Andreas Gursky's monumental "Paris, Montparnasse," from 1993, estimated to bring up to four hundred thousand dollars) are also featured. ♦ Nov. 16 at 10 A.M.: Part II of the sale includes a selection of works by Keith Haring. ♦ Nov. 19 at 7 and Nov. 20 at 10 A.M.: Latin-American art works by such artists as Botero, Matta, Varo, and Rivera, as well as contemporary figures. ♦ Nov. 20 at 2: Fine wine. (20 Rockefeller Plaza, at 49th St. 636-2000.)

CHRISTIE'S EAST
Nov. 19 at 10 A.M. and 2: Entertainment memorabilia, including such items as an overcoat worn by Al Pacino in "The Godfather, Part II" and a 1936 poster for the first of the "Flash Gordon" movies. (219 E. 67th St. 606-0400.)

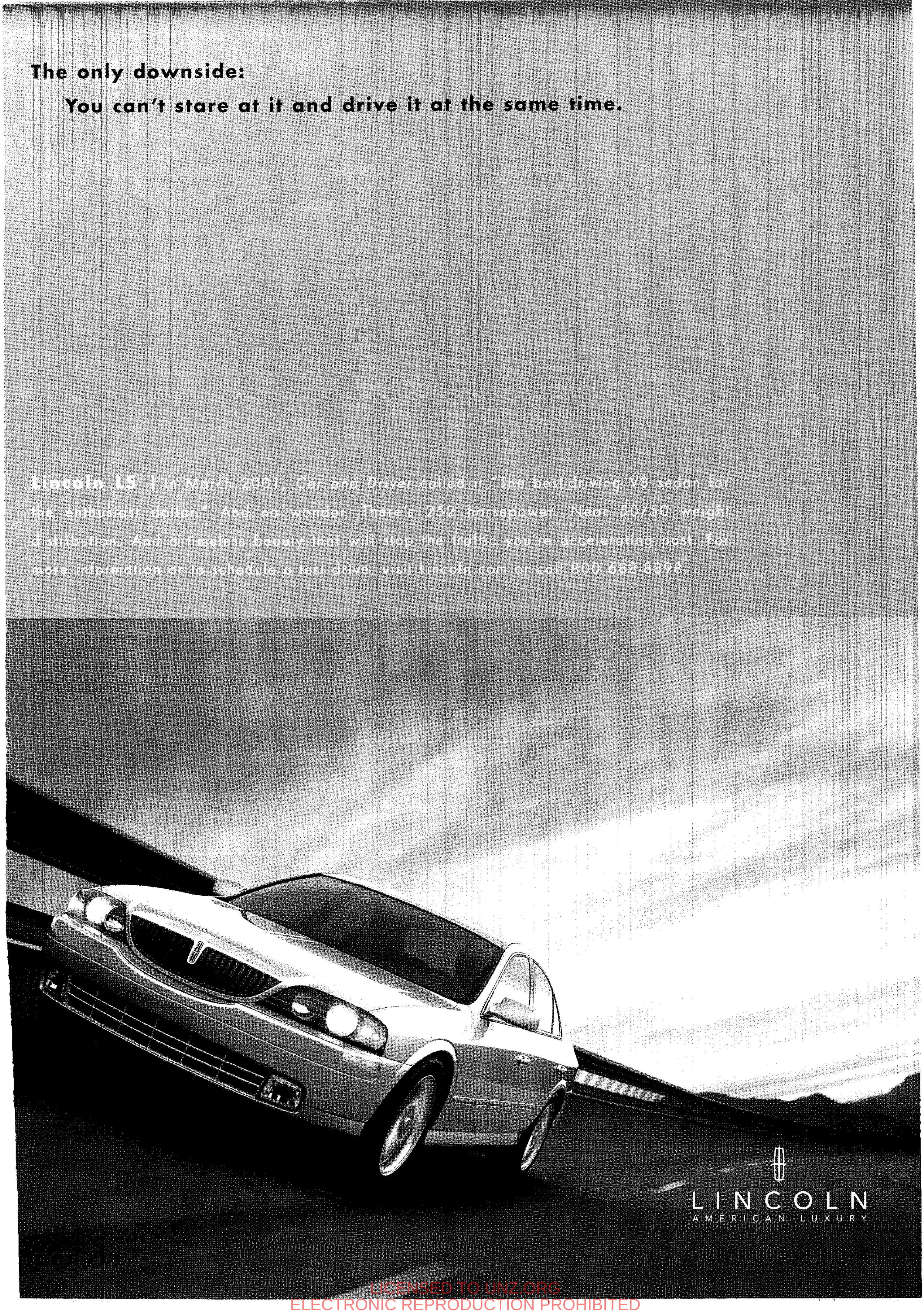
PHOTOGRAPHY

HARRY BENSON
When "I Want to Hold Your Hand" hit No. 1 in the U.S., the Beatles picked up a slot on the "Ed Sullivan Show"; the night they learned the news, at the Hotel George V in Paris, Harry Benson was there. His photographs of the ensuing pillow fight have weathered reproduction well—a new print of the best composed and best known of that series is the largest item in this small retrospective. In the years following the British Invasion, Benson covered many more serious and less hopeful cultural turning points, including the deaths of Martin Luther King, Jr., and Robert Kennedy. But he always returned to entertainment, notably following another pop star into the bedroom in 1997, this time to offer up the singer Michael Jackson with his plump infant son. Jackson *père*, caught handing off a pacifier to someone outside the frame, is splayed across a gold throne, in a pearl-studded jacket, black pants, and wrinkled white socks. It is to Benson's great credit that the Man in the Mirror looks so human. Through Dec. 1. (Staley-Wise, 560 Broadway. 966-6223.)

GUIDO GUIDI
These images of empty museums and neglected urban spaces in Guidi's native Italy, made with an eight-by-ten view camera, turn minimal subjects into lush and vibrant images marked with delicate fields of color. Through Nov. 24. (Richardson, 535 W. 22nd St. 646-230-9610.)

JOEL MEYEROWITZ
Meyerowitz has been photographing full time at Ground Zero lately, but these works document downtown before the fall. The eleven large color prints on show (three appeared in our issue of 9/24/01) represent only a fraction of "Looking South," twenty years' worth of images of the same panoramic view of lower Manhattan, dominated by the World Trade Center. Meyerowitz's Twin Towers, like Richard Misrach's Golden Gate Bridge, shimmer, glow, and tangle with clouds, serving as the setting for complex variations of weather and light. Through Dec. 15. (Meyerowitz, 580 Broadway, 625-3434.)

SARAH MOON
Moon modelled briefly in the sixties, then moved to the other side of the camera in 1968. She exposes and develops her images so that their often-



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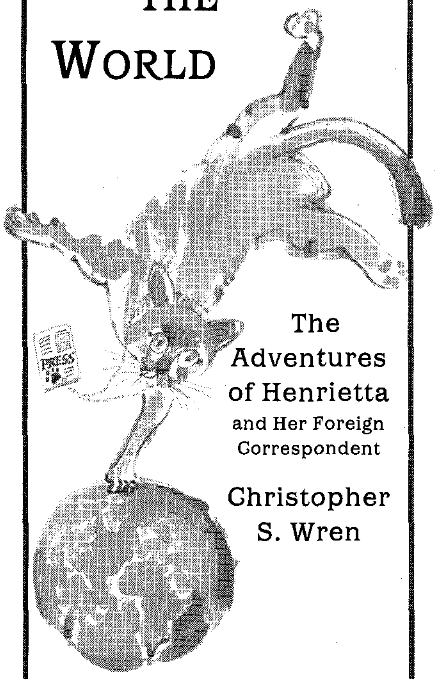

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blurred subjects—frequently women, birds, and landscapes—float in a nocturnal-looking haze. While other photographers, like Joel Peter Witkin, have used similar techniques to produce prints that look deceptively like tintypes and daguerreotypes, Moon's shadowy tones entice rather than deceive. Several color images in pigment prints are the candy of the show—one shows a raspberry-colored flower floating above a Windex-blue glass on a taxicab-yellow mat. Through Dec. 8. (Greenberg, 120 Wooster St. 334-0010.)

JULIE MOOS
For "Domestic," Moos sat wealthy homeowners down with the people they employ as housekeepers, against a stark gray background. The resulting double portraits are nearly as stiff and uncomfortable as the sitters, and only a few make it hard to guess who's paying whom. Her "Friends and Enemies" (2000) included double portraits of prep-school allies and adversaries, leaving the viewer to wonder not only who the sitters were but which images showed which relationship; the game is more engaging when there is more to guess with fewer clues. Through Nov. 21. (Freiser, 504 W. 22nd St. 633-6555.)

HELMUT NEWTON
Newton doesn't always literally mingle the title topics in "Sex and Landscapes," but even his seemingly innocuous images—"Berlin-Halensee," a sort of Central Park Sheep's Meadow with Speedos, and "Patrouille de France, Monte Carlo," military jets crossing paths in maneuvers over an aircraft carrier—insinuate a bit. Some of the nudes and nearly nudes that the panoramas are displayed with seem, analogously, to have taken on attributes of landscape, with harsh lighting raking the models' bony, hilly forms, splayed on beds and pressed against mirrors. This tightly focussed exhibit is the most concentrated by far of several recent Newton shows; an expansive retrospective remains at the International Center of Photography. Through Dec. 21. (Boone, 541 W. 24th St. 752-2929.)

INTERNATIONAL CENTER OF PHOTOGRAPHY
1133 Sixth Ave., at 43rd St. 857-0000—**"Helmut Newton: Work,"** a retrospective; **"The Construction of the Paris Opera: Photographs of Delmaet and Durandelle"**; and **" 'Greed' and Other Recent Acquisitions"** are on show through Dec. 30. (Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, 10-5; Fridays, 10-8; Saturdays and Sundays, 10-6.)

Short List

IMOGEN CUNNINGHAM
Stevenson, 338 W. 23rd St. 352-0700.
Through Jan. 5.

NIKKI S. LEE
Tonkonow, 535 W. 22nd St. 255-8450.
Through Dec. 1.

NICHOLAS NIXON
Zabriskie, 41 E. 57th St. 752-1223.
Through Nov. 24.

"HERE IS NEW YORK"
Here Is New York, 116 Prince St. 334-6684.
Through Dec. 24.

"SEPTEMBER 11 PHOTO PROJECT"
September 11 Photo Project, 26 Wooster St.
358-3423. Through Dec. 24.

CLASSICAL MUSIC
OPERA

METROPOLITAN OPERA
"Madama Butterfly," with Cynthia Lawrence, Maria Zifchak, Richard Margison, and Juan Pons; the conductor is Marco Armiliato. (Nov. 14 and Nov. 17 at 8.) ♦ **"La Traviata,"** with June Anderson, Vinson Cole, and Juan Pons; Maurizio Benini. (Nov. 15 and Nov. 19 at 8.) ♦ Elijah Moshinsky's new production of Verdi's **"Luisa Miller,"** with Sondra Radvanovsky, Wendy White, Martin Thompson, Nikolai Putilin, Hao Jiang Tian, and Paul Plishka; Joseph Colaneri. (Nov. 16 at 8.) ♦ The first performances this season of **"Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg,"** with Solveig Kringelborn, Jill Grove, Johan Botha, Mathias Zachari-

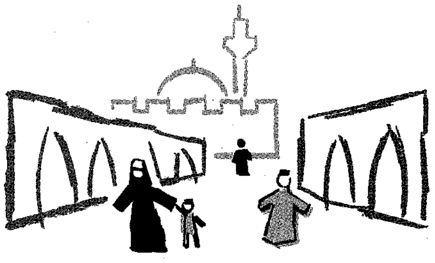
BOOK CURRENTS
Back to the Middle East

In 1998, as five-star hotels displayed signs that read "Marg bar Amrika" ("Death to America"), Terence Ward's family returned to Iran, where they had lived during the nineteen-sixties as American expatriates. Determined to find their old housekeeper and cook, the Wards flew into the southern Iranian city of Shiraz; **SEARCHING FOR HASSAN** (Houghton Mifflin) recounts their nostalgic, sometimes harrowing pilgrimage. When the family left in 1969, Iran was gripped by *gharbzadegi*, or "intoxication with the West"; in the nineties, the Wards learned new phrases such as "I agree with everything you have ever said or thought of in your life" and "Thank you very much for showing me your marvelous gun."

After a thirty-year hiatus, the poet Mourid Barghouti returned to his old home on the West Bank and felt for the first time that "Palestine at this moment is not the golden map hanging on a golden chain adorning the throats of women in exile." Barghouti's memoir, **I SAW RAMALLAH** (American University in Cairo), translated from the Arabic by Ahdaf Soueif, won the Naguib Mahfouz Medal for Literature in 1997.

The "home" Raja Shehadeh longs for in **STRANGERS IN THE HOUSE: COMING OF AGE IN OCCUPIED PALESTINE** (Steerforth) is back in Jaffa, the city from which his family fled in 1948. Shehadeh, born in Ramallah three years later, knows of Jaffa only through the protest against the occupation waged by his father, Aziz, a prominent lawyer and an early advocate of the two-state solution. Raja, also a lawyer, defies his moderate father to become an activist, co-founding Al-Haq, the first West Bank organization devoted to documenting violations of Palestinian human rights.

—Dana Goodyear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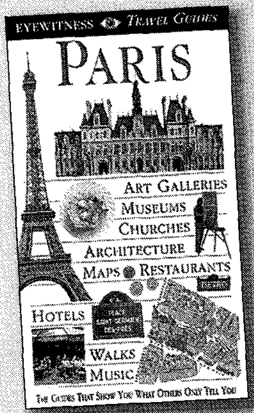

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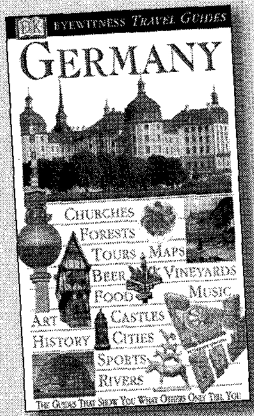

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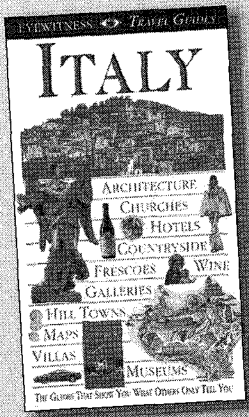

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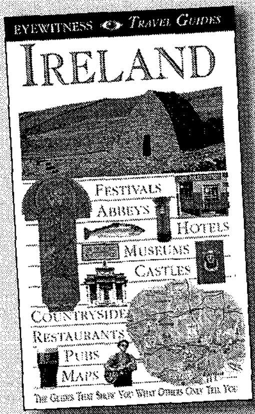

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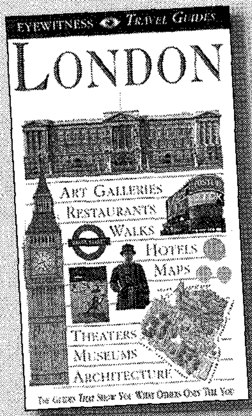

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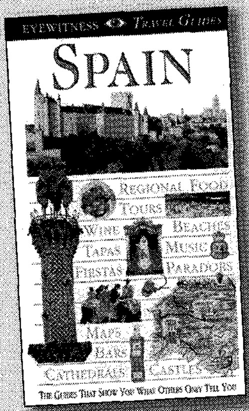

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assen (in his début), James Morris, Eike Wilm Schulte, and René Pape; James Levine. (Nov. 17 at noon and Nov. 20 at 6.) (Metropolitan Opera House. 362-6000.)

NEW YORK CITY OPERA

“Turandot,” with Anna Shafajinskaia, Oksana Krovytska, Carl Tanner, and David Michael; George Manahan conducts. (Nov. 14 at 7:30, Nov. 16 at 8, and Nov. 18 at 1:30.) ♦ Deborah Drattell's **“Lilith,”** a new opera that imagines a meeting between Eve and Adam's first wife. With Beth Clayton (in the title role), Lauren Flanigan (as Eve), Dana Beth Miller, Marcus DeLoach, and Tom Nelis; George Manahan. (Nov. 15 at 7:30 and Nov. 17 at 1:30.) ♦ **“The Magic Flute,”** performed in English, with Alexandra Coku, Helen Todd, Don Frazure, Kevin Burdette, and John Marcus Bindel; Steven Mosteller. (Nov. 17 at 8.) (New York State Theatre. 307-4100. These are the final performances of the fall season.)

"ZENO AT 4 A.M."

Taking a pivotal chapter from “The Confessions of Zeno,” Italo Svevo's classic modernist novel from 1923, the director William Kentridge and the composer Kevin Volans—both South African-born—constructed a “shadow oratorio” (receiving its New York première) illustrating Zeno's obsessively narcissistic (and ineffectual) attempts to come to terms with the death of his father. Volans's mournful minimalist score, performed by the Duke Quartet and a chorus, is not really the main draw; it supports Kentridge's grim realization of Zeno's visual universe, by means of film and a live performance by South Africa's Handspring Puppet Company. The actor Dawid Minnaar and the bass-baritone Otto Maidi speak and sing, respectively, Jane Taylor's libretto. (Tenth Ave. at 58th St. 721-6500. Nov. 14-16 at 8 and Nov. 17 at 3 and 8.)

JUILLIARD OPERA CENTER: "SUSANNAH"

Julius Rudel conducts Carlisle Floyd's sweetly lyrical folk-opera classic, which sets the Apocryphal story of Susannah and the Elders in rural twentieth-century Tennessee. Eve Shapiro is the director. (Juilliard Theatre, 155 W. 65th St. 721-6500. Nov. 14 and Nov. 16 at 8 and Nov. 18 at 2.)

AMATO OPERA

“Tosca,” the second production of the chamber company's fifty-fourth season, is directed and conducted by Anthony Amato. (Amato Opera Theatre, 319 Bowery. 228-8200. Nov. 16-17 at 7:30 and Nov. 18 at 2:30. Through Nov. 25.)

ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

NEW YORK PHILHARMONIC

In his Symphony No. 13 (from 1962), “Babi Yar,” one of the great cultural monuments of the Khrushchev thaw, Shostakovich stood up to Soviet authority for the last time, setting five poems by Yevtushenko for chorus, orchestra, and baritone soloist. The poems were not only a memorial to the tens of thousands of Ukrainian Jews massacred near Kiev by the Nazis in September of 1941 but an implicit denunciation of the virulent anti-Semitism that still raged in Soviet society. Kurt Masur, who conducted the first Philharmonic performances of the work in 1993, brings it back in these concerts with the same baritone, Sergei Leiferkus. Another electrifying soloist, the violist Yuri Bashmet, joins the orchestra for the New York première of the Viola Concerto by Sofia Gubaidulina, the contemporary Russian composer whose Asian-influenced music can match the intensity of her predecessor's. (Avery Fisher Hall. 721-6500. Nov. 15-17 at 8.) ♦ Masur conducts his last Carnegie Hall concert as the Philharmonic's music director, leading another Shostakovich symphony (the lighter and gently satirical No. 1, in F Minor) and Bruckner's Symphony No. 4 (the “Romantic”). (247-7800. Nov. 19 at 8.)

ORCHESTRA AND CHOIR OF THE CHURCH OF ST. IGNATIUS LOYOLA

Pablo Casals's frequent visits to the monastery of Montserrat, near Barcelona, provided the inspiration for Paul Moravec's Cello Concerto (with Arthur Fiacco), which envisions Casals high atop the Catalonian mountain site, “looking out toward the Mediterranean, playing his cello forever.” Kent Tritle conducts the world première, along with music by Barber (the rarely performed oratorio “Prayers of Kierkegaard”) and Arvo Pärt. (Park Ave. at 84th St. 288-2520. Nov. 14 at 8.)

NEW YORK COLLEGIUM

This Baroque chorus and orchestra, which divides its concerts between New York and Boston, opens its season with a performance of sacred music, in new editions, by Charpentier (including the “Messe à 8 Voix”). Martin Gester conducts. (Church of St. Vincent Ferrer, 869 Lexington Ave., at 66th St. 717-9246. Nov. 16 at 8.)

Andreas Scholl sings songs by Dowland, Campion, Caccini, and others at Weill Recital Hall, with the lutenist Karl-Ernst Schröder, on November 16.

LARA TOMLIN

RECITALS

ST. LUKE'S CHAMBER ENSEMBLE

The group presents Bach's Brandenburg Concertos, complete. (Weill Recital Hall, Carnegie Hall. 247-7800. Nov. 14 at 8.)

BARGEMUSIC

Nov. 15-16 at 7:30: Music for strings by Purcell, Haydn, and Beethoven (the first of the “Razumovsky” Quartets, in F Major), played by the violists Carmit Zori and Todd Phillips, the violist Scott Lee, and the cellist Julia Lichten. ♦ Nov. 17 at 7:30 and Nov. 18 at 4: Zori and the cellist Timothy Eddy join Gilbert Kalish in piano trios by Haydn and Schubert (the Trio in E-Flat Major, Op. 100). (Fulton Ferry Landing, Brooklyn. 718-624-2083.)

NEW YORK FESTIVAL OF SONG: "SPANISH GOLD"

The singers Jennifer Aylmer and Vivica Genaux, along with the guitarist Giuliano Belotti, are the guests for a program of classical and folk music from the Iberian peninsula (including works by Granados and Rodrigo). Steven Blier is at the piano. (Weill Recital Hall, Carnegie Hall. 247-7800. Nov. 15 at 8.)

ANDREAS SCHOLL

This pure-toned German countertenor, whose musicianship combines forceful lyricism with interpretive restraint, makes his Weill Recital Hall début (with the lutenist Karl-Ernst Schröder) with a program of early music, featuring songs by Dowland, Campion, and several Italian composers. (247-7800. Nov. 16 at 8.)

RENÉE FLEMING AND JEAN-YVES THIBAUDET

Songs by Rachmaninoff (along with music by Strauss and Debussy) are a focus of this recital, in which the sparkling surfaces of Thibaudet's piano playing provide a foil for Fleming's luxurious voice. (Carnegie Hall. 247-7800. Nov. 17 at 7:30.)

KODÁLY STRING QUARTET

Hungary's leading quartet presents Beethoven's Quartet No. 1 in F Major along with Haydn's two “Lobkowitz” quartets, each a majestic example of the composer's later style. (92nd St. Y, Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 415-5500. Nov. 17 at 8.)

ROBERT WHITE AND BRIAN ZEGER

The tenor and the pianist present an evening of newly commissioned American songs by such composers as Milton Babbitt, David Del Tredici, Daron Hagen, Dick Hyman, and Gian-Carlo Menotti. (Metropolitan Museum of Art, Fifth Ave. at 83rd St. 570-3949. Nov. 17 at 8.)

EWA PODLEŚ AND GARRICK OHLSSON

Podleś, a rich-toned Polish contralto of commanding style who is never stingy with the *espressivo,* teams up for songs by Rachmaninoff and Mussorgsky with the American pianist, who also performs a set of Scriabin études. (Alice Tully Hall. 721-6500. Nov. 18 at 2.)

EMANUEL AX AND YEFIM BRONFMAN

Two renowned pianists present music for two pianos by Brahms (the “Haydn Variations”) and Rachmaninoff (the Suite No. 2). (Avery Fisher Hall. 721-6500. Nov. 18 at 3.)

AN DIE MUSIK

Schoenberg's “Transfigured Night,” a rather serious late-Romantic tone poem for strings about sexual indiscretion, follows Bruce Adolphe's “Little Red Riding Hood,” an entertainment narrated by Dr. Ruth Westheimer. Music by Schubert and Mozart completes the chamber ensemble's program. (Merkin Concert Hall. 129 W. 67th St. 501-3330. Nov. 18 at 4.)

MARK DRESSER

For some, the savage swing and crunchy tones produced by this avant-jazz double-bass soloist—a longtime session pal of Anthony Braxton and John Zorn—will be a healthy corrective to the smiley-faced charm of Edgar Meyer's Appalachian riffs. He presents new improvisational works, including homages to Charles Mingus and Bertram Turetzky, at Roulette. (228 W. Broadway. 219-8242. Nov. 18 at 8.)

RAVI SHANKAR

The legendary sitar player offers a concert at Carnegie Hall, part of a “farewell” U.S. tour. (247-7800. Nov. 18 at 8.)

ABOVE AND BEYOND

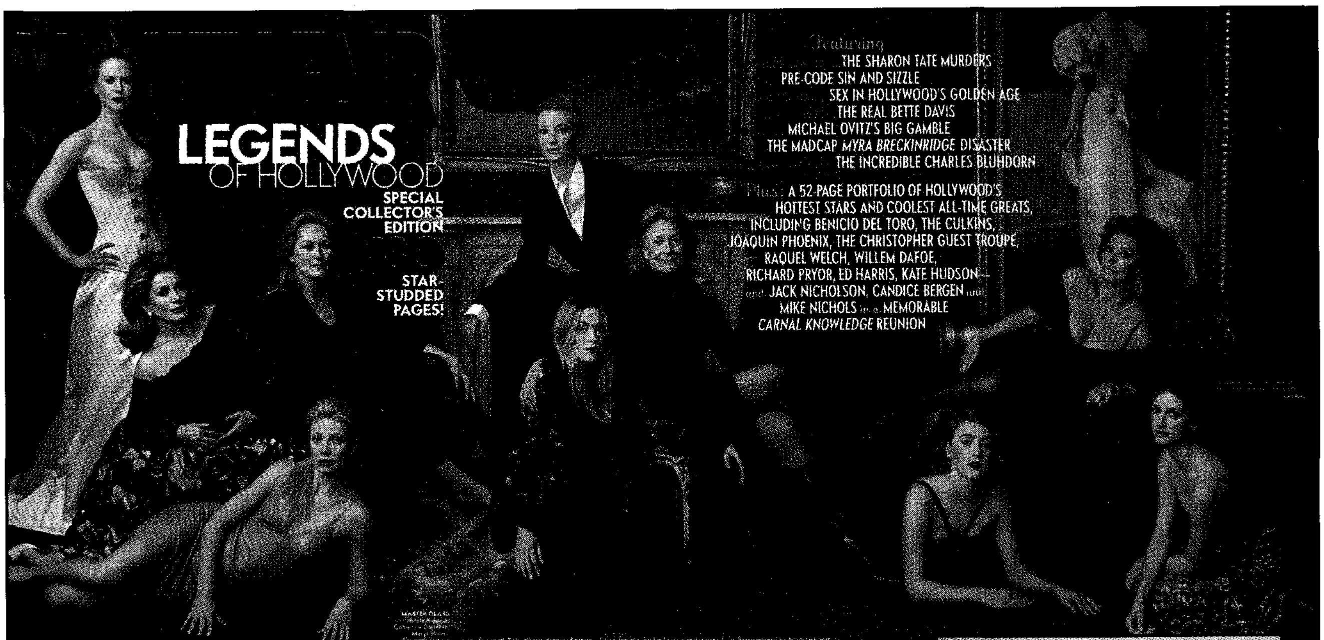
READINGS

Nov. 15 at 7: By Elizabeth Alexander, Breyten Breytenbach, Galway Kinnell, Chuck Wachtel, and other writers, from their work. (Fales Collection, Bobst Library, New York University, 70 Washington Sq. S. Admission by contribution. For more information, call 998-8816.) ♦ Nov. 15 at 7:30: By K. A. Dilday, Rachel King, David Levine, Diane Mehta, Rebecca Schuman, and other contributors to the literary Web site Flaneur.org, from their essays, stories, and poems. (Halcyon, 227 Smith St., Brooklyn. No tickets necessary.) ♦ Nov. 18 at 7: By Alex Shakar, from his novel, “The Savage Girl,” and by the novelist Cees Nooteboom, from “All Souls Day.” (K.G.B., 85 E. 4th St. No tickets necessary.)

TALKS

Nov. 14 at 6: Carol Willis, the director of the Skyscraper Museum, joins the architectural historian John Kriskiewicz and Anthony Robbins, the author of “The World Trade Center,” for a panel discussion about the legacy of the Twin Towers, organized by the Municipal Art Society. The writer Tony Hiss is the moderator. (Urban Center Galleries, 457 Madison Ave., at 51st St. For more information, call 935-3960.) ♦ Nov 16 at 7: The writer Janet Malcolm talks about her latest book, “Reading Chekhov.” (Graduate Center, City University of New York, Fifth Ave. at 34th St. No tickets necessary.)

STAR POWER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MOVIES OPENING

AUGGIE ROSE
Jeff Goldblum plays a man who decides to assume the identity of a murder victim after he meets the victim's pen pal (Anne Heche). Opening Nov. 16. (Cinema Village.)

BOMBAY EUNUCH
Reviewed below in Film Notes. Opening Nov. 16.

THE FLUFFER
Wash West and Richard Glatzer directed this story of a young man's love for a gay porn star. With Scott Gurney, Michael Cunio, and Deborah Harry. Opening Nov. 16. (Quad Cinema.)

HARRY POTTER AND THE SORCERER'S STONE
Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. Opening Nov. 16.

NOVOCAINE
David Atkins wrote and directed this comedy with Steve Martin as a prosperous dentist who gets seduced by one of his patients (Helena Bonham Carter). Opening Nov. 16.

THE SIMIAN LINE
An ensemble drama directed by Linda Yellen about the fallout among a group of friends when a psychic predicts that one couple will soon split up. With Harry Connick, Jr. Opening Nov. 16.

THE WASH
Car-wash employees band together to save their kidnapped boss in this comedy directed by DJ Pooh. With Dr. Dre, Snoop Dogg, George Wallace, and Angell Conwell. Opening Nov. 14.

FILM NOTES

AMÉLIE
A waifish Parisienne discovers her mission in life: to bring unexpected happiness to others, and so to herself. Such is the story of Amélie (Audrey Tautou), and the simplicity of it—not to mention its dangerous surfeit of sweetness—appears to have touched a universal nerve. (In truth, the saga of the movie's success is more telling than anything in the movie itself.) Tautou is clearly a find, although one wonders what Mathieu Kassovitz, who plays the object of her affection, made of his role; it was Kassovitz who, in 1995, yanked French cinema up to date with his baring of ethnic hostilities in "La Haine." The Paris of this new movie lies at the other extreme, although what nags at you most is not the neighborly charm but the itchy, unsettled manner of the director, Jean-Pierre Jeunet. How far should we trust a plea for benevolence when it feels like a box of tricks? In French.—*Anthony Lane* (Reviewed in our issue of 11/5/01.) (Angelika Film Center and Paris.)

BLACKMAIL
A London-set Hitchcock silent thriller that was in part reshot and in part dubbed to make it a sound film—and an unusually imaginative and innovative one. With its trick shots in the British Museum and a chase on the museum roof, the 1929 film seems almost German in its pictorial style, and the heroine is indeed played by the German actress Anny Ondra, who married Max Schmeling.—*Pauline Kael* (Walter Reade Theatre; Nov. 18.)

BOMBAY EUNUCH
A fascinating documentary by the filmmaker Alexandra Shiva about the plight of a group of impoverished eunuchs in India. The film eloquently conveys the day-to-day challenges of a small marginalized community where prostitution and panhandling are the basic means of survival. The contradictory nature of their lives—they walk the poverty-stricken streets in brightly colored saris and perfect makeup (imagine Diana Ross easing on down the road as Ma Joad in "The Grapes of Wrath")—is vivid and jarring. The movie never condescends—it dignifies these social outcasts with a street-smart focus on their bravery and humor. In English, Hindi, and Tamal.—*Bruce Diones* (The Screening Room.)

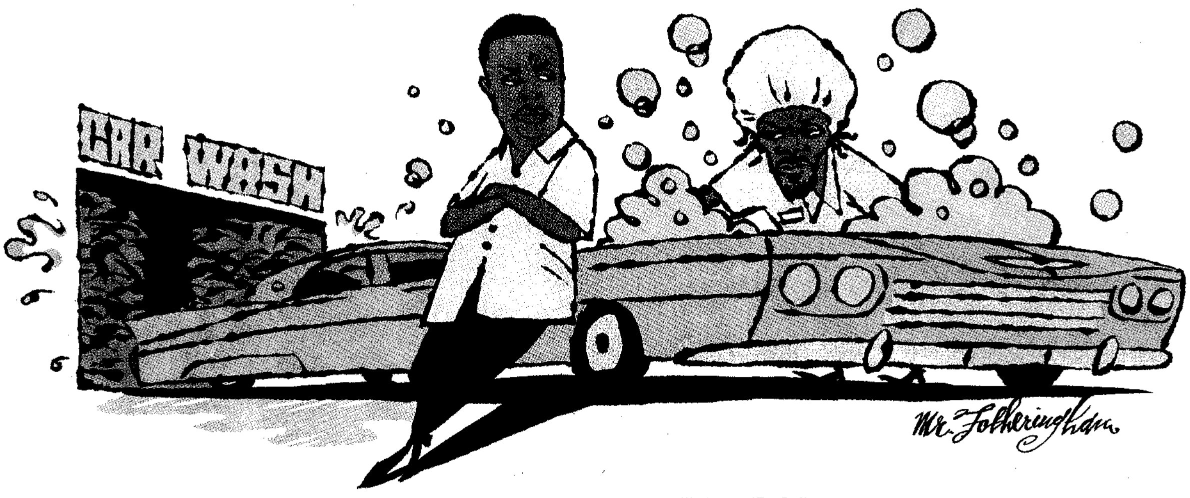
DR. MABUSE, THE GAMBLER
In 1922, Fritz Lang made the ultimate Saturday matinée for adults, combining primal fun with sophistication. He pits the evil genius Mabuse, who manipulates the stock market and the gambling table, against an attorney with a license to do anything. But what gives the film an added kick is the way it portrays nineteen-twenties Germany in comic-book terms—like an ancestor of today's graphic novels. The characters and images are redolent of the post-World War I era that Lang described as "a period of hysteria, despair, and unbridled vice, full of the excesses of an inflation-ridden country." Aimless profligates and aristocrats—including a man-about-town, an aesthete, and the aesthete's bored wife—become victims of Mabuse, who is a hypnotist and shrink as well as an all-around criminal mastermind. And with inventive editing and camera placement, Lang makes Mabuse's mind control viscerally unsettling.—*Michael Sragow* (BAM Rose Cinemas; Nov. 15-16.)

DOMESTIC DISTURBANCE
A movie for divorced dads who want to believe that their ex-wife married a monster. John Travolta plays, rather too sincerely, the father who believes his son (a chronic liar) when the son says he's witnessed his new stepdad commit a murder. Imagine a thriller so predictable that it's over before it starts.—*B.D.* (First & 62nd Cinemas, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, 19th Street East 6, Orpheum VII, 34th Street Theatre, and Village Theatre VII.)

DONNIE DARKO
Jake Gyllenhaal, last seen in "Bubble Boy," stars as a mentally disturbed teen-ager who cheats death and gets spooked about it. Written and directed by Richard Kelly in a somnambulistic style, the movie is essentially about a young boy's search for himself—he's fighting his inner voices. But as the movie shifts from fantasy to reality and back again a dreary anomie sets in. Patrick Swayze gives a notable performance as a corrupt motivational speaker—his smarm energizes the dour mood.—*B.D.* (Empire 25 and Village East Cinemas.)

THE ENDURANCE
A documentary about Sir Ernest Shackleton's 1914 Antarctic expedition—a triumph of human will, or, more literally, the ultimate example of sang-froid. Caroline Alexander wrote the concise narration, and the director, George Butler, takes care to etch the awesome physical realities at the bottom of the world. His camera hovers inches above the frigid dark-blue waters and pans across a merciless horizon of frozen sea. Frank Hurley, the expedition's original documentarian, performed a small miracle by saving his photo negatives and film reels. The scenes he shot of the men exercising the Canadian sled dogs and working furiously to extract their trapped ship are the gem within the film's careful casing.—*Michael Agger* (59th Street East Cinema and Village East Cinemas.)

FROM HELL
Allen and Albert Hughes trade in the mean streets of Los Angeles for those of London circa 1888. Their Jack the Ripper movie has its source in a graphic novel by Alan Moore, who delved into the architecture of Nicholas Hawksmoor, the rites of Freemasonry in Victorian England, and other subtexts in order to invent a plausible fiction of who the Ripper may have been. The Hughes brothers take this careful work and tart it up, making it over into a gruesome, blood-soaked spectacle. Johnny Depp, peering through his forelock, is Inspector Fred Abberline, a policeman who finds his suspects in opium dreams. This makes for nice visual montages—including some unforgettable pulsating red grapes—but little in the way of suspense. With Heather Graham, theoretically playing the Irish prostitute Mary Kelly.—*M.A.* (Chelsea Cinemas, Empire 25, First & 62nd Cinemas, and Village East Cinemas.)



Opening November 14, Dr. Dre and Snoop Dogg in the action comedy "The Wash."

EDWIN FOTHERINGHAM

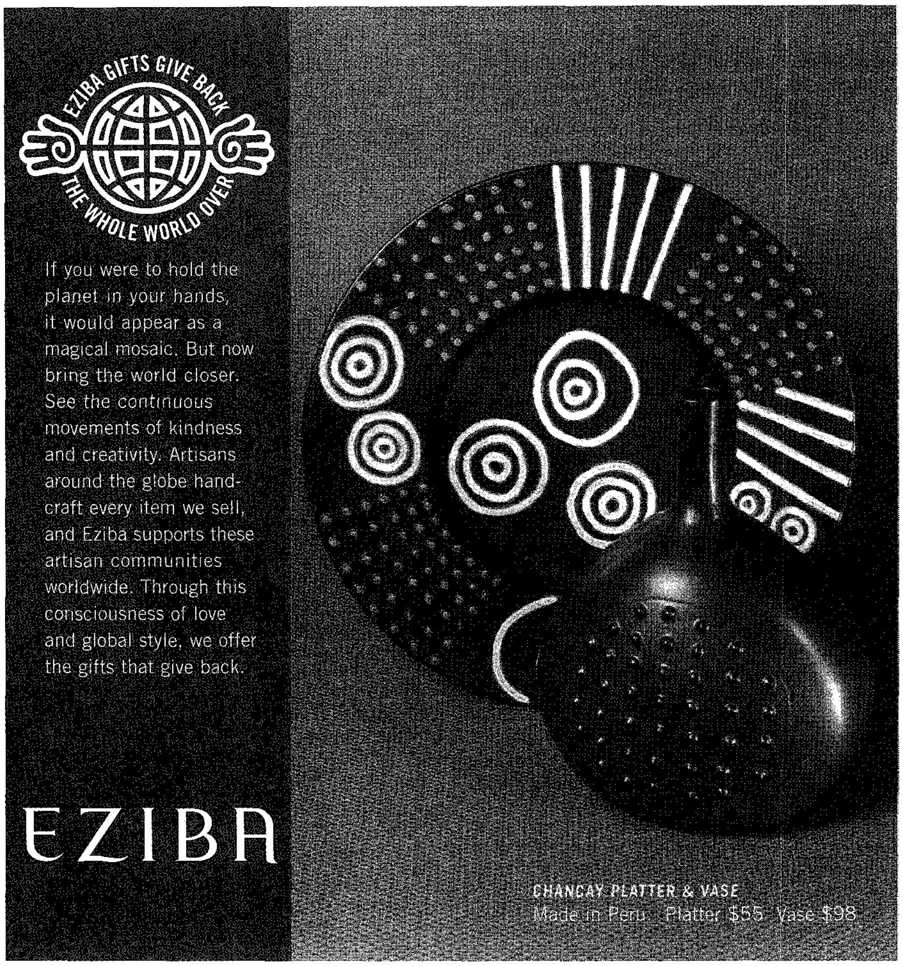
HEIST
David Mamet's debonair safe-cracking movie is high-grade fun all the way through. As Joe Moore, a steely but convivial Boston thief, the great Gene Hackman dispels the Mamet chill (the portentous and equivocal atmosphere of such films as "House of Games" and "The Spanish Prisoner"). Hackman, age seventy-one, sends waves of energy through the entire production. Mamet plays his usual games—the characters are always turning the tables on one another—but this time he's much more involved in the physical life of what he's showing us. The cast includes Rebecca Pidgeon as a hipster moll; Delroy Lindo as Hackman's loyal old friend; Ricky Jay as a witty utility man who is so quick that he can, without preparation, throw himself in front of a moving car in order to divert the police. Only Sam Rockwell, as a young sleaze, is a disappointment.—*David Denby* (11/12/01) (Empire 25, First & 62nd Cinemas, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, 19th Street East 6, Park & 86th Street Cinemas, 34th Street Theatre, and Village Theatre VII.)

INTIMACY
Jay (Mark Rylance) and Claire (Kerry Fox) meet for sex every Wednesday in Jay's unfurnished London flat. Photographed in a ghostly light, the two grapple silently; their lovemaking is more about hunger and release than pleasure. The director Patrice Chéreau, adapting stories by Hanif Kureishi, seems to be attempting a generational portrait of Londoners in their thirties who are not quite gifted or single-minded enough to fulfill their dreams—failed musicians, painters, and actors who have drifted into wretchedness and bickering. The movie has some fine moods of bafflement and rage, but much of it is garbled and rather vague. The camera, right on top of the actors, seems to be chasing something that it can't find. With Timothy Spall as Claire's faithful husband, by far the most fully created character in the movie.—*D.D.* (10/29/01) (Angelika Film Center and Eastside Playhouse.)

K-PAX
As a creature named Prot who may have dropped in from another planet, Kevin Spacey has a good moment with a dog, kneeling down with the frisky beast and interpreting its barks as speech. But that's about it. What should have been spooky fun is mainly soft-brained and painstakingly earnest. Jeff Bridges, looking about thirty pounds heavier than usual, plays a workaholic psychiatrist who cannot figure out whether Prot is truly an alien or just a head case. Meanwhile, Prot liberates all the bedraggled psychotics who live in the mental ward with him. The director, Iain Softley, uses the lunatics as a kind of comic chorus—an offensive idea masquerading as daring humanism.—*D.D.* (Beekman, Chelsea Cinemas, Empire 25, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, Olympia I and II, Orpheum VII, 34th Street Theatre, and Union Square.)

THE LAST DETAIL
After fourteen years in the Navy, Buddusky (Jack Nicholson), the tattooed signalman, lives on ingrained resentment, quick anger, and booze. The screenwriter, Robert Towne, shaped the role to Nicholson's gift for extremes, and it was the best full-scale part he'd had up to that time (1974). The movie, directed by Hal Ashby, is the record of the beer-soaked journey that Buddusky and a gunner's mate (Otis Young) take when they're assigned to escort a morose eighteen-year-old seaman (Randy Quaid) from the brig in Norfolk, Virginia, to the naval prison in Portsmouth, New Hampshire. The film is distinguished by its remarkably well-orchestrated profane dialogue—it's often very funny and it's programmed to wrench your heart.—*P.K.* (Film Forum; Nov. 14-15.)

LIFE AS A HOUSE
Kevin Kline gives a persuasive and ornery performance as a middle-aged failure who devotes himself to building a dream house on the golden cliffs of California. He plays an architect who doesn't think much of himself but is determined to follow his own path, and Kline's face is lit by anger in ways that we've never seen from him in movies. Much of the picture, until the tear-dripping conclusion, is charming. As the house goes up, various people drop in to saw a few boards, flirt, or make mischief. Kristin Scott Thomas, relaxing onscreen for the first time, plays George's rueful ex-wife. Hayden Christensen is his sixteen-year-old son—pierced, eye-



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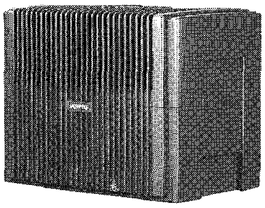

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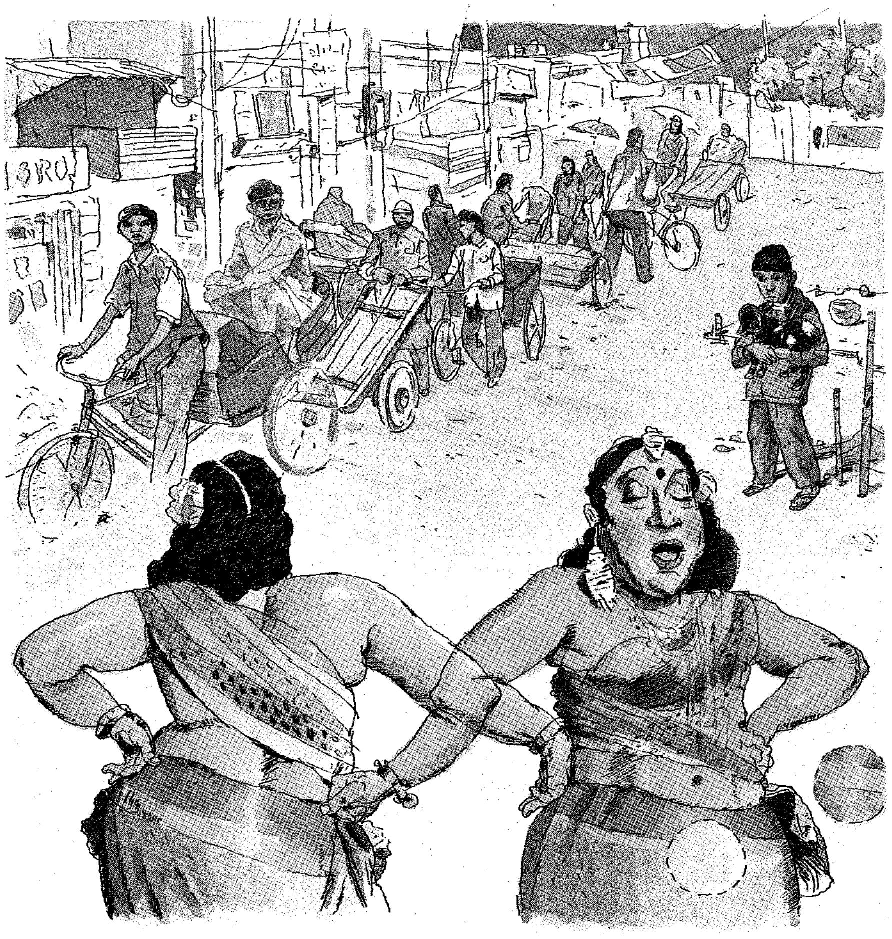


At the Screening Room, Alexandra Shiva's "Bombay Eunuch."

JOHN CUNEO

shadowed, and drugged. The sunshiny cinematography is by Vilmos Zsigmond. Irwin Winkler directed.—*D.D.* (10/29/01) (Chelsea West, Cinema II, East 86th Street Cinemas, 84th Street Sixplex, Empire 25, Lincoln Square, Murray Hill Cinemas, 34th Street Theatre, and Village Theatre VII.)

LOLA

This first film by Jacques Demy, released in 1961, is like an adolescent's dream of romance, formed from old movies. Lola (Anouk Aimée) is simple and open, an untalented and not too bright cabaret dancer, a vulnerable, sentimental girl. The film gives us life rose-tinted—a lovely, quirky mixture of French-movie worldliness circa 1939 and the innocent cheerfulness of the Gene Kelly–Frank Sinatra M-G-M musicals of the forties, with their generous, shy sailors, looking for love. Characters suddenly get rich or are stranded on an island, and Lola's dreams come true—and not just her dreams but her illusions. In French.—*P.K.* (Film Forum; Nov. 16-20.)

THE MAN WHO WASN'T THERE

The latest Coen brothers project is shot in smooth, glittering monochrome: a calmly told tale of murder without mayhem. We are on the brink of the nineteen-fifties, with its distinctive fears and badges of honor: Big Dave (James Gandolfini) can still lay claim to a good war record, while his wife, in all honesty, reports a visit from outer space. Billy Bob Thornton plays Ed, a barber living quietly with his wife (Frances McDormand) in northern California. He tries his hand at blackmail, and the plan misfires—justice catches up with him in the end, although, even then, he is the wrong man. Unfortunately, Thornton is so cool in the role that you simply don't believe that he would pass unnoticed. The whole film has the air of a clever, unthrilling conceit—a guided tour of film noir, without the sweat and compulsions of the real thing. With Tony Shalhoub, stealing the picture as a lawyer de-luxe.—*A.L.* (11/5/01) (BAM Rose Cinemas, Chelsea Cinemas, Empire 25, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, New York Twin, 34th Street Theatre, and Village Theatre VII.)

MONSTERS, INC.

A thoroughly charming movie from the artists and storytellers at Pixar that wins you over with its jazzy, retro title sequence and then introduces the pun-filled world of Monstropolis, where creatures of all description toil in factories, collecting the screams of children. The visual invention is on par with Pixar's previous effort, "Toy Story 2," but the crazy quilt of cultural references and backdoor subversiveness of that movie gets toned down for something more sugary. John Goodman and Billy Crystal give voice to the two heroes, but the gold star goes to John Ratzenberger (Cliff from "Cheers") for his homespun Abominable Snowman.—*M.A.* (Chelsea Cinemas, Cinema I, East 86th Street Cinema, 84th Street Sixplex, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Olympia I and II, 34th Street Theatre, Union Square, and Ziegfeld.)

MULHOLLAND DRIVE

A woman wanders away from a car wreck and into a strange house. Little old people scurry under the foot of a door, squeaking like mice. Yes, it's a David Lynch project. This one began life as a TV pilot; you can just imagine the aghast faces of the network executives as they saw what they had commissioned. In the event, the elongated weirdness, stretching to two and a half hours, feels discomfortingly at home on the larger screen; if you ever wanted to see an epic horror soap, this is what it would look like. Many established Lynch motifs are in place, most of them summoned from one corner or another of the nineteen-fifties: the innocent blonde (Naomi Watts), the baffled brunette (Laura Elena Harring), the clueless cop (Robert Forster). Addicts of the director will tie themselves in knots trying to pick the lock of the film; the rest of us can lie back and enjoy the spooking. With Justin Theroux and, as a tough old landlady, Ann Miller. Yes, *that* Ann Miller.—*A.L.* (10/8/01) (Angelika Film Center, Chelsea Cinemas, East 85th Street, Empire 25, Kips Bay Theatre, and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

THE ONE

The "X-Files" alumnus James Wong and his partner Glen Morgan concoct a pointless martial-arts film for Jet Li that even the Rock wouldn't touch. (He backed out to do a prequel to "The Mummy Returns.") Li's considerable acrobatic skills are hampered by the overdone computer-generated effects—his performance is humorless and stunt-driven. The screenplay is some gobbledygook about parallel worlds that lacks the imagination Wong and Morgan brought to their previous movie, "Final Destination."—*B.D.* (Chelsea West, 84th Street Sixplex, First & 62nd Cinemas, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Metro Cinema 1 and 2, Orpheum VII, 34th Street Theatre, and Union Square.)

SHALLOW HAL

The Farrelly brothers try to be sensitive and miss the mark big time. The devilish-looking comedian Jack Black, a sexist loser who wants a physically perfect woman, receives a mystical hypnosis from the (literally) gigantic self-help guru Tony Robbins. While the rest of the world registers an unhappy three-hundred-pound blonde, Black sees a slender Gwyneth Paltrow, and his apparent generosity draws other women to him, too. The Farrelly brothers constantly make the jokes about fat women that they praise Black for not making, thereby reinforcing the very distaste that the movie is ostensibly trying to overthrow. Black is funny when he's dancing or bopping along the street, but the script calls for him to be crass and incapable of noticing anything, and Jason Alexander as his sidekick—an even more hopeless loser—screams and waves his arms endlessly. Paltrow, however, is lovely; when she plays the unhappy big girl (she's encased in layers of padding), her forlorn hopefulness is heartbreaking.—*D.D.* (Chelsea Cinemas, Empire 25, Metro Cinema 1 and 2, Murray Hill Cinemas, Park & 86th Street Cinemas, 64th and 2nd, 62nd & Broadway, and Union Square.)

TAPE

Richard Linklater, the same guy who directed the current feature "Waking Life," turns out a nifty adaptation of a single-set play by Stephen Belber (who also wrote the screenplay). It all takes place, in real time, in a dreary East Lansing motor hotel. An unusually animated Ethan Hawke plays a smart young drug dealer reuniting with an old high-school buddy (Robert Sean Leonard) who has become a film director. Leonard's character is the kind of pompous success who wants people to think well of him but may actually be a bit of a louse underneath; back in high school, he took the drug dealer's girlfriend away and may or may not have date-raped her. As the two men grapple, the girlfriend (Uma Thurman)—now an assistant district attorney—shows up in the motel room. You can see the theatrical manipulations coming, but you are held by the knife thrusts of aggression and the reversals at the end.—*D.D.* (Angelika Film Center, Empire 25, and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

TRAINING DAY

A synthetically plotted melodrama, but still it has power and depth. Denzel Washington is Alonzo Harris, a decorated Los Angeles narcotics cop who breaks in his new partner, Jake Hoyt (Ethan Hawke), a talented rookie from the Valley. Alonzo bullies and taunts the young man, teaching him the brutal wisdom of the street; Jake, who is highly moral, eager to impress, and ambitious, is hurt and baffled. It takes us a while to realize that what seem like random incidents on the street are really the outer edges of a malaise—the dishonesty of Alonzo and the other members of his undercover unit. Despite some trashy and conventionally violent scenes, the movie is psychologically interesting: the dominating and witty Alonzo wants the respect of the young man he's trying to corrupt. Washington is tormented and brilliant; it's his best performance so far.—*D.D.* (10/15/01) (84th Street Sixplex, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Orpheum VII, 64th and 2nd, and Union Square.)

WAKING LIFE

Like many revolutionary films, it has its longueurs, but Richard Linklater's first animated work, a painterly extension of reality, is astoundingly lovely and touching. He shot the material as a live-action feature and then turned the footage over to a team of animation artists, headed by Bob Sabiston, who enhanced and decorated each sequence. The resulting interplay between words and animation is both haunting and startlingly witty. What we see is an unformed young man (Wiley Wiggins) walking around Austin, Texas, where he encounters the coffeehouse Kierkegaards and ecstatically articulate bums who populated Linklater's initial triumph, "Slacker." (Most of the participants are local celebrities, not actors.) The young man thinks he's awake, but actually he's caught in an endless dream. Since the talk he hears is directed toward themes of reverie, apprehension, and death, we begin to wonder, after a while, if we are not witnessing his last moments of consciousness.—*D.D.* (11/12/01) (BAM Rose Cinemas, Empire 25, Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, and Union Square.)

WRITTEN ON THE WIND
A 1957 movie in which a Texas oil millionaire (Robert Stack) sweeps a secretary (Lauren Bacall) off her feet, marries her, and then gets to wondering whether the baby that she's going to have is really his or if it's the child of his best friend, a geologist (Rock Hudson). The Texan's nympho sister (Dorothy Malone) encourages his suspicions while trying to trap the geologist, who is, indeed, in love with the wife. The director, Douglas Sirk, shows his talent for whipping up sour stylized soap operas in posh settings.—*P.K.* (American Museum of the Moving Image; Nov. 17-18.)

ALSO PLAYING

KING OF THE JUNGLE
Angelika Film Center.
OTOMO
Film Forum.
RIDING IN CARS WITH BOYS
Empire 25, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, Orpheum VII, 64th and 2nd, and Union Square.
THE TOWN IS QUIET
Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.
TREMBLING BEFORE G-D
Film Forum.
VA SAVOIR
Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.

THEATRE ADDRESSES

Unless noted, call 777-FILM for show times.

Angelika Film Center, 18 W. Houston St.
Astor Plaza, 44th St. at Broadway.
BAM Rose Cinemas, 30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn.
Beekman, Second Ave. at 66th St.
Chelsea Cinemas, 260 W. 23rd St.
Chelsea West, 333 W. 23rd St.
Cinema I, Third Ave. at 60th St.
Cinema II, Third Ave. at 60th St.
Cinema 3rd Avenue, Third Ave. at 60th St.
Cinema Village, 22 E. 12th St. (924-3363).
East 85th Street, First Ave. at 85th St.
East 86th Street Cinemas, Third Ave. at 86th St.
84th Street Sixplex, Broadway at 84th St.
Empire 25, on 42nd St. near Eighth Ave. (398-3939).
59th Street East Cinema, 239 E. 59th St.
Film Forum, W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (727-8110).
First & 62nd Cinemas, 400 E. 62nd St.
42nd Street E Walk, 42nd St. near Eighth Ave.
Kips Bay Theatre, Second Ave. at 32nd St.
Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, Broadway at 63rd St.
Lincoln Square, Broadway at 68th St.
Metro Twin, Broadway at 99th St.
Murray Hill Cinemas, 160 E. 34th St.
New York Twin, Second Ave. at 67th St.
19th Street East 6, Broadway at 19th St.
Olympia I and II, Broadway at 107th St.
Orpheum VII, Third Ave. at 86th St.
Paris, 4 W. 58th St. (688-3800).
Park & 86th Street Cinemas, 125 E. 86th St.
Pioneer, 155 E. 3rd St. (254-3300).
Quad Cinema, 34 W. 13th St.
The Screening Room, 54 Varick St. (334-2100).
72nd Street East, Third Ave. at 71st St.
64th and 2nd, Second Ave. at 64th St.
62nd & Broadway, 62 W. 62nd St.
State, Broadway at 45th St.
Sutton 1 and 2, Third Ave. at 57th St.
34th Street Theatre, 312 W. 34th St.
Union Square, Broadway at 13th St.
Village East Cinemas, Second Ave. at 12th St.
Village Theatre VII, Third Ave. at 11th St.
Walter Reade Theatre, Lincoln Center (875-5600).
Ziegfeld, 141 W. 54th St.

REVIVALS, CLASSICS, ETC.

Titles with a dagger are reviewed above.

AMERICAN MUSEUM OF THE MOVING IMAGE
35th Ave. at 36th St., Astoria (718-784-0077)—Through Nov. 18: "Shadow Play: Avant-Garde Views of Early Cinema." Nov. 17 at 2: "Film Before Film" (1986, Werner Nekes). ♦ Nov. 17 at 4:30: A performance demonstrating early cinema effects using a stereoscopic slide projector and other machines. ♦ Nov. 18 at 2: "Mother Dao the Turtlelike" (1995, Vincent Minnikendam). ♦ Nov. 18 at 4:30: "Eadweard Muybridge, Zoopraxographer" (1995, Thom Andersen). ♦ Repertory nights. Nov. 17-18 at 6:30: "Written on the Wind" (†).

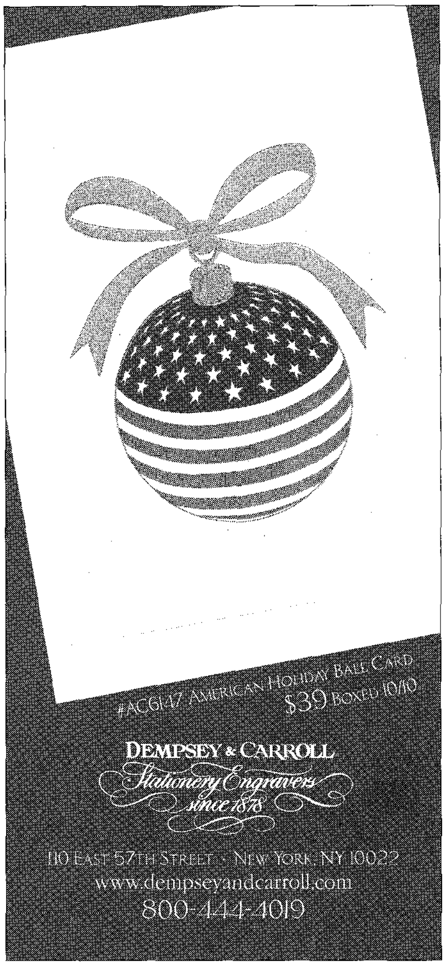
BAM ROSE CINEMAS
30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn (718-777-3456)—Nov. 14 at 6:30 and 9:10: "Careful, He Might Hear You" (1984, Carl Schultz). ♦ Nov. 15 at 7:30: "Dr. Mabuse, the Gambler, Part I" (†). ♦ Nov. 16 at 7:30: "Dr. Mabuse, the Gambler, Part II" (†). ♦ Nov. 17 at 2, 4:30, 6:50, and 9:10: "The Valiant Ones" (1974, King Hu; in Cantonese). ♦ Nov. 18 at 2, 4:30, 6:50, and 9:10: "The Barefooted Kid" (1993, Johnny To; in Cantonese). ♦ Nov. 19 at 6:50 and 9:10: "Social Realism and the Experimental Melodrama," screening as part of the American prewar avant-garde-cinema series. ♦ Nov. 20 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:10: "The Testament of Dr. Mabuse" (1933, Fritz Lang; in German).

FILM FORUM
W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (727-8110)—Through Nov. 15: A Hal Ashby retrospective. Nov. 14-15 at 1, 5:20, and 9:40: "Coming Home" (1978). ♦ Nov. 14-15 at 3:20 and 7:40: "The Last Detail" (†). ♦ Nov. 16-20 at 1, 2:50, 4:40, 6:30, 8:20, and 10:10: a new print of Jacques Demy's "Lola" (†).

FLORENCE GOULD HALL
55 E. 59th St. (355-6160)—A tribute to Jeanne Moreau. Nov. 20 at 12:30, 3:30, 6:30, and 9: "Diary of a Chambermaid" (1964, Luis Buñuel).

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
Roy and Niuta Titus Theatres, 11 W. 53rd St. (708-9480)—Through Nov. 30: A Paolo and Vittorio Taviani retrospective. All films are in Italian. Nov. 15 at 6 and Nov. 18 at 5:15: "Night of the Shooting Stars" (1982). ♦ Nov. 16 at 2:30: "Marriage Outlaws" (1963). ♦ Nov. 16 at 6 and Nov. 19 at 2:30: "The Subversives" (1967). ♦ Nov. 16 at 8 and Nov. 17 at 1: "Under the Sign of the Scorpion" (1969). ♦ Nov. 17 at 3: "St. Michael Had a Rooster" (1971). ♦ Nov. 17 at 5: "Allonsanfan" (1975). ♦ Nov. 18 at 12:30: "Padre Padrone" (1977). ♦ Nov. 18 at 3 and Nov. 20 at 6: "The Meadow" (1979). ♦ Nov. 19 at 6 and Nov. 20 at 2:30: "A Man for Burning" (1962).

WALTER READE THEATRE
Lincoln Center (875-5600)—Through Nov. 15: A tribute to *Cahiers du Cinéma*. Nov. 14 at 1 and 7:15: "Touch of Zen" (1969, King Hu). ♦ Nov. 14 at 4:15 and Nov. 15 at 9: "Van Gogh" (1991, Maurice Pialat; in French). ♦ Nov. 15 at 1: "Irma Vep" (1996, Olivier Assayas; in French). ♦ Nov. 15 at 3: "Hôtel des Amériques" (1980, André Téchiné; in French). ♦ Independents Night. Nov. 15 at 6:30: "Sunshine Hotel" (2001, Michael Dominic). ♦ Great pianists on film. Nov. 16 at 7: "The Secret Island," a documentary on the life of Rachmaninoff. ♦ Nov. 16 at 8:30: Benno Moisewitsch, Arthur Rubinstein, Josef Hofmann, and Murray Perahia. ♦ Nov. 17 at 5: Martha Argerich and Nelson Freire. ♦ Nov. 17 at 8: Alexis Weissenberg, Vladimir Ashkenazy, and Sviatoslav Richter. ♦ Through Dec. 6: "Silence to Sound." Nov. 18 at 2, 5:45, and 9:30: "Blackmail" (†). ♦ Nov. 18 at 3:45 and 7:30 and Nov. 20 at 9: "La Chienne" (1931, Jean Renoir; in French).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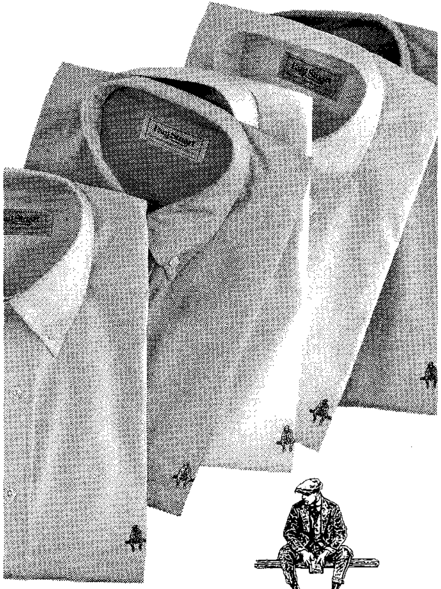
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THE NEW YORKER

THE TALK OF THE TOWN

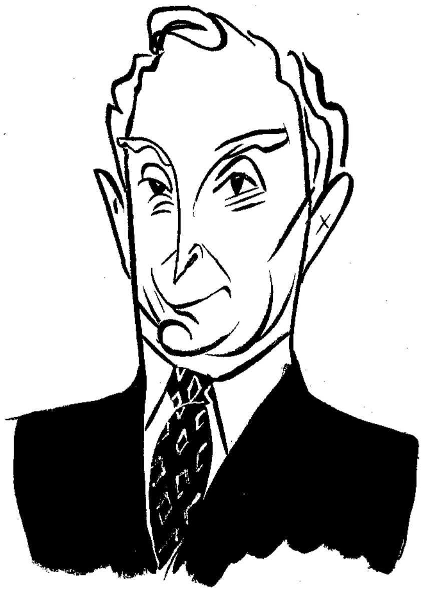
COMMENT
HIS HONOR

It was nearly one in the morning by the time Michael Bloomberg mounted the stage to deliver his victory speech at the B. B. King Blues Club & Grill, in midtown, last Wednesday. Perhaps in deference to the hour, or perhaps simply out of fatigue—he had been up for most of the previous night campaigning—the Mayor-elect kept his remarks short. He spoke briefly about his opponent, Mark Green, who, he said, "deserves the respect of all New Yorkers," and almost as briefly about his own triumph, which he called "a victory for our vision, and our faith in the future of the greatest city in the world." As he rushed along, only once did he appear to approach reflection, and that was when he looked back on his decision to enter the race.

"When I started thinking about running for mayor, I did talk to a number of close confidants who had political experience, and I guess the summary of what they told me is: 'Don't do it,'" he said to his supporters in the club, and whoever else in the city still had the TV set on. "Well, this time I didn't listen to them, thank goodness. What I did look at is how Rudy Giuliani and George Pataki had made our city better, our state better, and our lives better. And I looked at the gleam in the eyes of Ed Koch and Hugh Carey, who had been there earlier in saving the city, and I said, 'I want to do that, too!' "

ILLUSTRATIONS BY TOM BACHTELL

From the beginning, Bloomberg's candidacy had a shape at once strange and familiar: here was a man in the midst of a late midlife crisis, who, instead of buying a fast car or ditching his wife, decided to become mayor. He didn't much care what it would cost, or, for that matter, whether spending what it would cost was appropriate. Between what he shelled out on ads, advisers, and direct mailings—the total is expected to top sixty million dollars—he broke just about every record in political history. For most of the race, it seemed that even this wouldn't be enough, and then, suddenly, it was.



Michael Bloomberg

To win the Democratic nomination, Green had—very narrowly—defeated the Bronx borough president, Fernando Ferrer, and Ferrer, who had hoped to become the city's first Latino mayor, subsequently accused him of having done so by racist appeals. It is hard to know whether Ferrer was motivated by a genuine sense of grievance that also suited his political interests or by political interests masquerading as grievances. In any case, Green, who had spent his entire adult life on the left edge of New York politics, saw himself losing black and Latino support to a billionaire who until very recently had been a member of several all-white clubs.

Before Bloomberg decided to enter the race, he was not a Republican, and even during the campaign he kept hinting that he still wasn't one. Yet, just as the Democrats abandoned their candidate, New York's Republicans rallied around theirs. Mayor Giuliani produced a sixty-second TV spot for Bloomberg that has been compared to L.B.J.'s "Daisy" ad in its effectiveness. On the final day of the campaign, Green, outspent, outmaneuvered, and out of luck, put up a last, desperate commercial. "Are you going to let Mike Bloomberg buy your vote?" it asked.

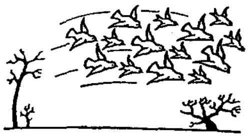
One way of looking at this election is, of course, to say yes—the contest proved that in politics, as in so many other realms of modern life, money trumps all. Certainly, apart from his wealth, Bloomberg could be considered only a mediocre candidate. For all his talk about how his business skills suited him to the challenge of rebuilding New York, his only really original proposal—that the reconstruction be overseen by the city, without interference from Albany—was rendered moot four days before the election, when Governor Pataki set up precisely the kind of state agency that Bloomberg said wasn't needed. The house organ of the city's business community, *Crain's New York Business*, was sufficiently unimpressed with Bloomberg's reconstruction plans that it ultimately endorsed Green.

But another way to make sense of the race is to observe that money was also, as it generally is, symbolic—perhaps especially so in these difficult times. Bloomberg presented himself as a man who would succeed as mayor because he had always succeeded in the past. If the logic wasn't rigorous, it gained force as the polls turned in his favor. When Green couldn't win even the support of the very groups whose interests he had always championed, the implications were grim. What voter is drawn to the prospect of four years of dreary impotence?

It has often been noted that Bloomberg will take office owing very little to anyone. This is the kind of freedom only money can buy, and for the sake of the city it can only be hoped that he will put it to good use. During the campaign, Bloomberg continually expressed surprise at the negative, can't-do culture of New York politics, with its ancient obligations and byzantine grudges; he couldn't understand, he said, why people would prefer to complain about the status quo than to risk changing it. This optimism was, one felt, instinctive rather than merely strategic, and it was an appealing aspect of Bloomberg's candidacy. "I want to do that, too!" may not be the best reason for running for mayor, but it isn't the worst, either.

—*Elizabeth Kolbert*

QUARRY
WHERE'S THE VEEP?



Officially (or, at least, according to the *Times*), Vice-President Dick Cheney was in a "secure" and "undisclosed" location, but unofficially it was duck season, and Cheney was in a duckblind, on the grounds of the Clove Valley Rod & Gun Club, in Union Vale, New York, twenty miles east of Poughkeepsie. This was two days before Halloween, when America, as per instructions, was on high alert.

"Secure," in this instance, must have been a reference to the snipers in the trees, the fighter jets in the sky, and the armada of government vehicles that guarded the Vice-President as he hunted pheasant and duck. "Undisclosed" would describe the lack of confirmation from Cheney's office that he was anywhere at all. But if you were to compare his location to, say, a cave in Afghanistan, or a bunker somewhere under the District of Columbia, "secure" and "undisclosed" seemed like a bit of an overstatement.

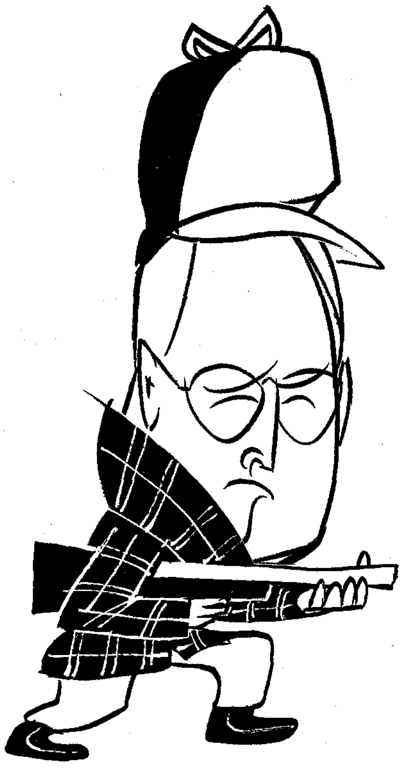
On Sunday, October 28th, Dutchess County residents began encountering roadblocks and traffic jams. Soon they were trading theories and placing calls to the Poughkeepsie *Journal*. The next morning, a headline in the paper read, "LOCAL TRAFFIC SNARLS, POLICE PRESENCE FUEL RUMOR OF CHENEY VISIT." No one—not local law enforcement, not the White House—would comment on the Vice-President's whereabouts.

The Rod & Gun is very private and very exclusive. It covers about six thousand acres of woodland and meadow, where between fifty and sixty thousand pheasant and duck are raised each year. (Every bird that gets shot is eventually eaten.) Past guests are said to include Norman Schwarzkopf, William Westmoreland, and Dwight Eisenhower. Among its members are numerous captains of industry, including, reportedly, a handful of top executives from Exxon. The word around Clove Valley the other day was that the Vice-President had come to the Rod & Gun on this occasion for the "Exxon shoot." If so, this, too, remained undisclosed. In any case, on the day of the shoot, he was among friends, which mitigated whatever concern there may have been over having the Vice-President around so many civilians with loaded guns.

That morning, a Poughkeepsie *Journal* reporter named Elizabeth Lynch drove down to the club to have a look around. Outside the clubhouse, in the lot, there were state police cars and unmarked black vans and Secret Service men. She walked inside and encountered a government agent, who asked, "How did you get in here?"

"I drove," Lynch said. Though Cheney was nowhere to be seen, the agent confirmed that the Vice-President was on the property. At that point, the club's manager approached and ordered her to leave. Outside, she took note of the chirping of birds and the faraway pop of shotguns.

The next day, the headline over Lynch's front-page story read, "CHENEY HUNTS IN UNION VALE." She wrote that a spokeswoman for the Vice-President would state only that "Cheney was at a private event at an undisclosed location," but, depending on your definition of disclosure and your access to the Poughkeepsie *Journal*, the spokeswoman's statement might no longer have been completely accurate.



Dick Cheney

Of course, by then, Cheney and his escort had moved on, and peace had returned to Clove Valley. "Security was tight, super tight," George Holzberger, the owner of a local foreign-car-repair shop, said last week. "It went off without a hitch, as far as it goes." Holzberger, who often hunts on private land abutting the club's, mentioned that friends of his had been in a blind next to Cheney's. "My understanding, as far as it goes, is he's a very good shot. It's nice to see him get a breath of fresh air. We were lucky to have the guy here."

—*Nick Paumgarten*

DEPT. OF RAW NERVES
HIJACK OPERA SCUTTLED

The composer John Adams, who made his name with "Nixon in China," is accustomed to getting entangled with current events. He did not protest a few years ago when a London performance of his piece "Short Ride in a Fast Machine" was cancelled in the wake of Princess Diana's death. He spoke up last week, however, after the Boston Symphony called off performances of three choruses from his opera "The Death of Klinghoffer," which tells of the hijacking of the Achille Lauro, in 1985. "I was told that Boston audiences were too 'fragile' to encounter my music at this time," Adams said, from his home in Berkeley. "Meanwhile, I noticed that Seiji Ozawa, their music director, was here in San Francisco, conducting a crazy symphony by Berlioz that ends with a graphic execution and a manic descent into hell."

As artists struggle to come to terms with the new reality, Adams's opera radiates a mesmerizing prophetic power. The opera infuriated some listeners at the time of its première, in 1991, because the librettist, Alice Goodman, let the terrorists speak for themselves. Certain passages, steeped in the Koran, now read like intelligence reports that went unheeded. "My soul is all violence," one of the Palestinian hijackers says. "My heart will break if I do not walk in Paradise within two days." On September 11th, Adams was in London, supervising a new recording of the score, which will be used in a forthcoming film version. At the moment the planes struck the World Trade Center, Yvonne Howard, in the role of Marilyn Klinghoffer, was rehearsing the climactic aria, in which the widow unleashes her rage and grief. "If a hundred people were murdered and their blood flowed in the wake of this ship like oil," she sings, "only then would the world intervene."

You might think that an orchestra would seize the opportunity to present such acutely relevant material. But Mark Volpe, the Boston's managing director, was quick to give reasons for the cancellation. In the "Klinghoffer" choruses, the orchestra was to have been joined by the Tanglewood Festival Chorus, one of whose members had lost her husband, Ted Hennessy, in the attacks. He was aboard Flight 11, which flew into the north tower of the World Trade Center. "After singing in the memorial service for Ted," Volpe said, "a few members of the chorus came to me, wondering how, exactly, we were going to approach this." Ozawa raised the same issue and asked Volpe to talk to Robert Spano, who was to conduct. Spano agreed that there was a problem. "For me, it simply wasn't fair to the work to present a few excerpts out of context so soon after the attacks," the conductor said. "Before you pick the scab, you have to let it heal."

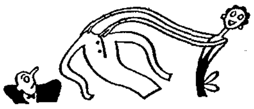
John Oliver, the conductor of the Tanglewood Festival Chorus, had been looking forward to the "Klinghoffer" performance, but he understood the management's decision. "The opera opens with a Chorus of Exiled Palestinians," he told me. "It is a mysterious, beautiful piece that contains some very violent language. There is a line about breaking the invaders' teeth with stones. As a performer, in order to get that across, you have to summon up a certain bloodthirstiness. Right now it's a lot to ask, considering what one of our most beloved singers has been through."

Adams was not swayed by these arguments. "I grieve for this woman's lost companion and for all victims of the attacks," he said. "But my opera is not a work of anger and violence. It strives for compassion and understanding." Adams was especially irritated that a letter he received from the Boston Symphony contained the following sentence: "It's at moments like these that we are reminded how great music can provide solace and comfort." He said, " 'Klinghoffer' was clearly in some other, more risky category. It made me realize once again how the obsession with 'great' music is reducing classical music to the status of a museum culture."

In place of the "Klinghoffer" choruses, Boston audiences will hear Aaron Copland's First Symphony, a now unobjectionable work that caused some controversy in its day. In 1925, on the occasion of the première, the conductor Walter Damrosch said of Copland, "In five years he will be ready to commit murder." Letting the audience judge for itself, he played the music anyway.

—*Alex Ross*

ON THE BLOCK
THOROUGHLY MODERN DOLLY



This week, Sotheby's concludes an online auction of gowns, costumes, hats, wigs, and false eyelashes belonging to the singer and actress Carol Channing. The most historic item for sale—estimated to bring in between a thousand and fifteen hundred dollars—is the gigantic white-feathered hat that she wore in the finale of the original, 1964 production of "Hello, Dolly!"

"I had three great big wonderful hatpins that would go into that, but if I missed they'd go right through my head," Channing, who is eighty years old and still performing, said over the telephone last week, from her home in Rancho Mirage, California. Her voice was a smoky rasp mixed with a little-girl lisp. "We never missed. I don't know how it happened. In all the five thousand performances, I never missed with those hatpins."

The auction of Channing's memorabilia is expected to raise as much as seventy-five thousand dollars, and she intends to give the money to charity. "Everybody has costumes lying around, and we don't know what to do with them," she said. After September 11th, she read an article about how Stuyvesant High School, near the World Trade Center, had suffered extensive damage owing to "osmosis from the twin buildings," as Channing put it. "I don't know how much we can get, but, whatever I do get, I'd like to give to the school.

"I don't have access to all my memorabilia," she went on. "Somebody took the red dress, darn it, from 'Hello, Dolly!'

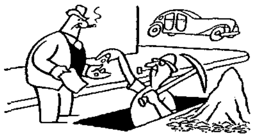
Yes, the one that comes down the steps and all. I'm reporting it to the police, and if they ever see any sign of it they'll let me know." Other signature gowns were stolen as well, such as a much photographed white dress she wore at the end of the show. "Doggonit, it's gone," she said. "Boy, it's somewhere. Some drag queen is wearing it, I'll bet you."

Many of the auction lots, particularly the hats—including a rhinestone-studded hard hat that Channing wore when she was shot out of a cannon, while screaming "Raspberries!," in the 1967 film "Thoroughly Modern Millie"—are offered with one of her platinum wigs (she's a natural brunette), while other lots are simply assortments of wigs and false eyelashes. "The eyelashes were just from her personal stash," said Tim Luke, of TreasureQuest Auction Galleries, which is co-hosting the auction with Sotheby's. "And all the wigs have been combed out. We didn't clean those or anything, because they were all in good condition. She stored them properly."

"Yes," Channing said, somehow stretching the word into three syllables. "It's a forty-year collection of wigs. I don't need to wear them anymore, because I have white hair now, and it looks about the same. But when we opened 'Hello, Dolly!' in San Francisco, they told me there wasn't a blond wig left in town. I was so proud of that. I really was."

—*Andy Young*

LOOT
DUTCH SCHULTZ'S MILLIONS



In Phoenicia, New York, a tidy hamlet in the Catskills, rumor holds that it is illegal to walk down Main Street carrying a shovel. According to the local police chief, this is not true. An older, more widespread rumor, however—the rumor that generated the shovel rumor—has yet to be proved false: that the gangster Dutch Schultz, fearing a long prison term (which he didn't get) or assassination (which he did, in 1935), loaded his ill-gotten millions into a steel box and buried it on the banks of the Esopus Creek.

Treasure seekers have haunted Phoenicia ever since. Among them is Laura Levine, who grew up in Chinatown and has been coming to the mountains since childhood. She is now forty-three and spends considerable time in Phoenicia, where she runs an upscale junk shop. She is also a mushroom hunter, a graduate of Harvard, a rock-and-roll photographer-turned-painter (the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and Museum is currently exhibiting her folkish paintings of rock pioneers), and, now, a documentary filmmaker. "Digging for Dutch: The Search for the Lost Treasure of Dutch Schultz" recently had its première at the Woodstock Film Festival, twenty minutes from Phoenicia.

Levine, who looks a bit like a shaggy sister of Debra Winger, cannot recall when she first heard the Schultz legend. The steel box was said to contain bonds, cash, diamonds, and gold, worth perhaps fifty million dollars today. Levine eventually decided that it would be silly not to look for it. Soon, her lark became an obsession. She picked up a video camera and began to record every clue she found and every story she heard. She was not bothered that each story placed the treasure in a different spot. "Basically, everyone thinks it's buried in his own back yard," she said.

Levine learned that the treasure was buried near three pine trees. Or maybe beneath a lone poplar, or fourteen feet from a big sycamore. Schultz definitely carved an X in the tree, unless he didn't; one pesky treasure hunter has since carved X's on a number of trees to throw off the competition. Some people believed that Schultz stashed the treasure outside of town beneath a rock outcropping known as Devil's Face. (This theory stems from a line in Schultz's famously incoherent deathbed ramble: "Mother is the best bet, and don't let Satan draw you too fast.")

The town undertakers, Gene Gormley and Mark Wilsey, told Levine that they were in possession of Schultz's treasure map. They had one problem: the treasure itself was inaccessible, for X marked a spot that seemed to be directly beneath a highway built long since Schultz's time. Another local, a writer named Monica Randall, also professed to have located the treasure—simply by dangling a pendulum over a map of the area—but said that she wasn't interested in digging it up. A gangster's money, she said, would have bad energy.

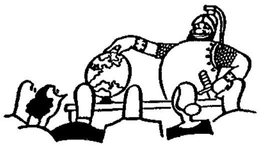
Levine herself is bothered by the money's provenance. Schultz, known to his mother as Arthur Flegenheimer, was a particularly despicable gangster, vicious and charmless and cheap. Levine has resolved to start an animal refuge if or when she finds his money. James Schick, a retired cartographer who drove up from Virginia to dig in Phoenicia, said that he'd return half of it to the citizens of Harlem, whose nickels and dimes funded Schultz's numbers racket.

Schick's tale is the centerpiece of Levine's film. One night, he said, while watching a segment about Schultz's treasure on "Unsolved Mysteries," he "went into a state." Schick found himself standing alongside Schultz and his cronies on the very night they buried the steel box. After returning to his senses, Schick drew up a detailed map of what he had seen and set out for Phoenicia. "I am not a seer," he told Levine. "I am not a swami or a sooth or any of that crap—forgive me. I'm just an ordinary person, but I think all of us are sensitive to voices."

Then there was Barbara Reen, a psychic, who, on camera, contacted Schultz directly. Levine pushed her to ask him for clues. He revealed, if nothing else, his vanity. "If I were to tell you exactly where the treasure is, then there'd be no more search," the gangster said, via the psychic. "There'd be no more fun, and I wouldn't be famous anymore."

—*Stephen J. Dubner*

VISITING DELEGATION DEPT.
THE NEW ROMANIA



If you saw the recent ad in the *Times* that invited readers of the international-news section to "GET TO KNOW THE NEW ROMANIA ON THE OCCASION OF THE VISIT TO THE UNITED STATES OF PRIME MINISTER ADRIAN NASTASE," perhaps you visited the Web site mentioned in the ad and clicked on the Romanian Embassy's schedule of events related to the visiting Prime Minister. You might then have noted the phone number of the Romanian Embassy in Washington, D.C., and given it a call. Maybe people there sounded pretty busy ("Please, if you would phone again in one half of an hour . . ."). Maybe the Embassy referred you to the Romanian Consulate in New York, which in turn referred you to the Romanian Cultural Center on Third Avenue, where on a Thursday night you showed up thinking that you were going to hear the Romanian Prime Minister but instead found yourself talking to an American man in drag who was seating some Romanians as they arrived late for an evening of non-Romanian one-act plays entitled "An Evening of Drag Queens, Love Cats, Good Girls & Bad Guys." Perhaps you were about to forget the new Romania altogether until, on the recommendation of a woman who sat in a small office in the cultural center, you took a cab uptown to the St. Regis Hotel and were directed to the Versailles Suite, which is very old Romania (crystal chandeliers, string quartet), and in a few minutes found yourself in a room of Romanian and Romanian-American business leaders who were drinking cocktails, waiting for the Prime Minister and talking about the new Romania.

Nicolae Arnici, the chief of the sales department of Rami-Dacia, a company owned by the Romanian Ministry of the Interior, was taking snapshots at the event and talking up the new Romania's synthetic-diamond industry. "Now we can tell you that it is very possible to do very, very good business in Romania," he said. He was also positive about the new Canada, which he had just visited. "We were very impressed," Arnici said, "because it is not like this, not like America. It's another life style. Canada is a little better for us to understand. It's more like life in Romania."

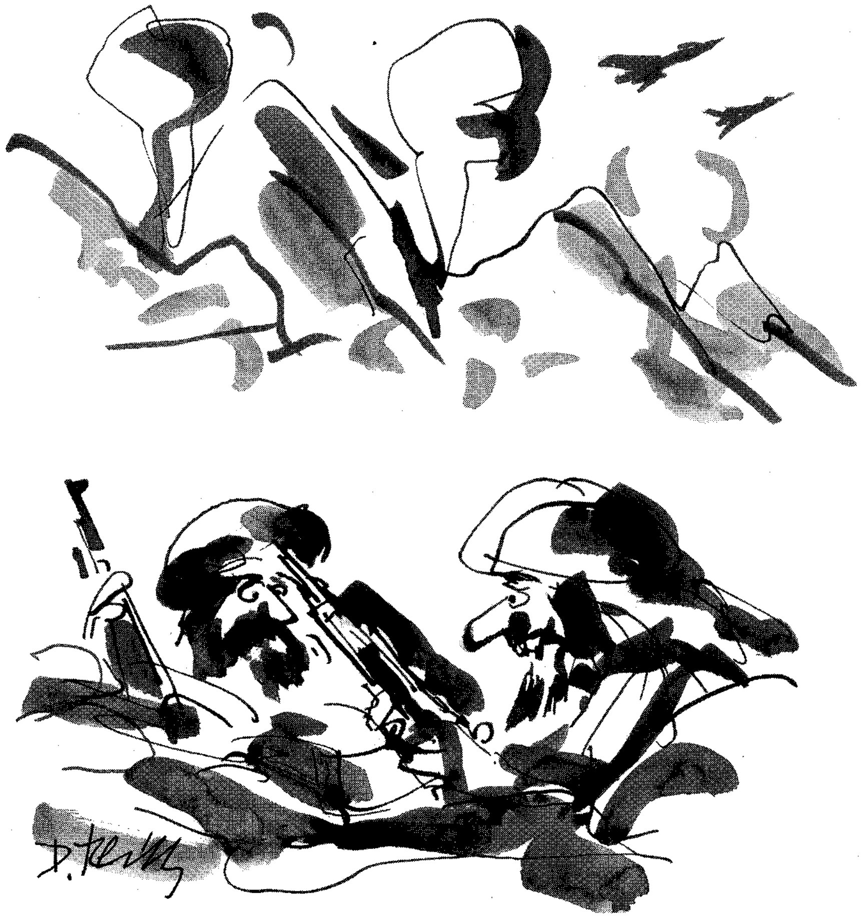
Leon Garabet, a Romanian-American jewelry importer who works on Forty-seventh Street, was wearing a non-synthetic diamond ring the size of the Carpathian Mountains and laughing at an old Romanian general who kept walking back and forth across the Versailles Suite in a green Romanian Army uniform with one star on the lapel. "He looks like he's maybe from the old Romania, I believe," Garabet said.

Also on hand was Mark Meyer, the chairman of the Romanian-American Chamber of Commerce. Meyer went to Romania eleven years ago and fell in love with the place. He praised the Prime Minister, who, he said, loves to spend time in New York. Meyer has taken the Prime Minister shopping for antiques at the Sixth Avenue flea market, and the Prime Minister has even stayed at his apartment, as have several other Eastern European leaders. "The last three Presidents of Moldova—Snegur, Lucinschi, Voronin—I've had all of them over to my place," Meyer said. "Snegur I knew about and we had a big event. But with Lucinschi it was last minute. I served Devil Dogs and pizza to Lucinschi. I mean, I'm single. What am I gonna do?"

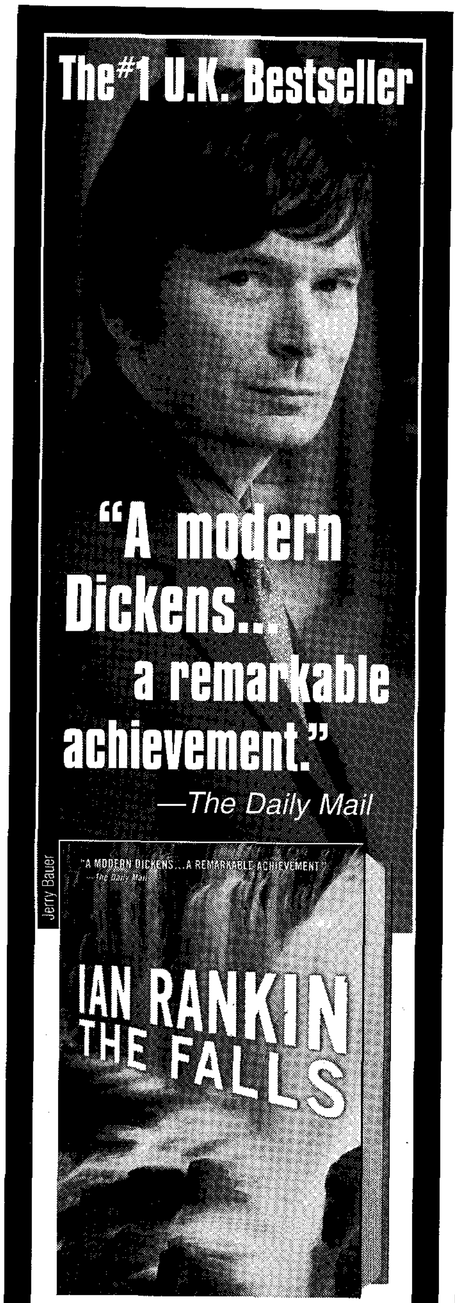
The Prime Minister arrived late. He'd met with business leaders all day, visited ground zero, and been in Washington for meetings with the White House and the State Department. He walked into the Versailles Suite smiling and shaking hands. The Prime Minister said a few words, and even pushed some real estate—specifically, old Soviet-era defense plants. "They are waiting with excellent utilities, with electricity, with water, whatever," he said. The Prime Minister had to leave early—he had more business meetings—but, before he did, Mark Meyer toasted him. "*Noroc*," Meyer said, which is Romanian for "good luck."

If you did not get to meet the new Romanian Prime Minister that evening, then you could have stopped by the Waldorf-Astoria the next day, where he was signing free copies of a book he has written, "Battle for the Future." Waiting in line, you could hear people talking about all kinds of new Romania things: the mayor of Bucharest, Traian Basescu, who recently got into a feud with Brigitte Bardot over roaming packs of dogs in the city; the new Dracula theme park being built in Transylvania, which has been held up by Universal Pictures, the studio that owns the rights to the image of Bela Lugosi as Dracula; and the hot Romanian-Italian restaurant in Bucharest, Davinci. When you got to the front of the line, you could meet the Romanian Prime Minister for yourself. "It is a pleasure," he said. "Thank you very, very much for coming."

—*Robert Sullivan*



"I understand that we may get a chance to meet Geraldo."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LETTER FROM GAZA

AN ARSENAL OF BELIEVERS

Talking to the "human bombs."

BY NASRA HASSAN

Just before midnight on June 30, 1993, three members of the Palestinian fundamentalist group Hamas sat in their hideout, a cave in the hills near Hebron, and began reciting from the Koran. At dawn, when the men heard the morning call to prayer from a mosque in the village below, they knelt and uttered the traditional invocation to Allah that Muslim warriors make before setting off for combat. They put on clean clothes, tucked the Koran into their pockets, and began the long hike over the hills and along dry riverbeds to the outskirts of Jerusalem. In the Palestinian neighborhoods of East Jerusalem, they walked in silence so that their accents, the guttural vernacular of Gaza, would not arouse suspicion. Along the way, they stopped to pray at every mosque. At dusk, they boarded a bus that was heading toward West Jerusalem, filled with Israeli passengers. When the driver thwarted their attempt to hijack the vehicle, they tried to detonate the homemade bombs they were carrying. The bombs failed to go off, so they pulled out guns and began firing wildly. The shots injured five passengers, including a woman who later died. The young men fled the bus, hijacked a car at a red light, and forced the driver to take them toward Bethlehem. Israeli security forces stopped them at a military checkpoint, and in a shootout two of the young men and their hostage were killed. The third hijacker, whom I will call S., was struck by a bullet in the head; he lay comatose for two months in Israeli hospitals. Finally, he was pronounced brain-dead, and the Israelis sent him back to his family in the Gaza Strip to die. But S. recovered, and when we met, five years later, he told me his version of the events. By then, he was married and the father of three sons. Each of them had been named for *shaheed batal*—"martyr heroes."

In Gaza, S. is celebrated as a young man who "gave his life to Allah" and whom Allah "brought back to life." He was polite as he welcomed me into his home. The house was surrounded by a high cement wall that had been fortified with steel. We sat down in a large, simply furnished room whose walls were inscribed with verses from the Koran. On one wall was a poster that showed green birds flying in a purple sky, a symbol of the Palestinian suicide bombers.

S. had recently turned twenty-seven. He is of slight build, and he walked with a limp, the only trace of his near-death. He invited his wife to join us, and he answered my questions without hesitation.

I asked him when, and why, he had decided to volunteer for martyrdom. "In the spring of 1993, I began to pester our military leaders to let me do an operation," he said. "It was around the time of the Oslo accords, and it was quiet, too quiet. I wanted to do an operation that would incite others to do the same. Finally, I was given the green light to leave Gaza for an operation inside Israel."

"How did you feel when you heard that you'd been selected for martyrdom?" I asked.

"It's as if a very high, impenetrable wall separated you from Paradise or Hell," he said. "Allah has promised one or the other to his creatures. So, by pressing the detonator, you can immediately open the door to Paradise—it is the shortest path to Heaven."

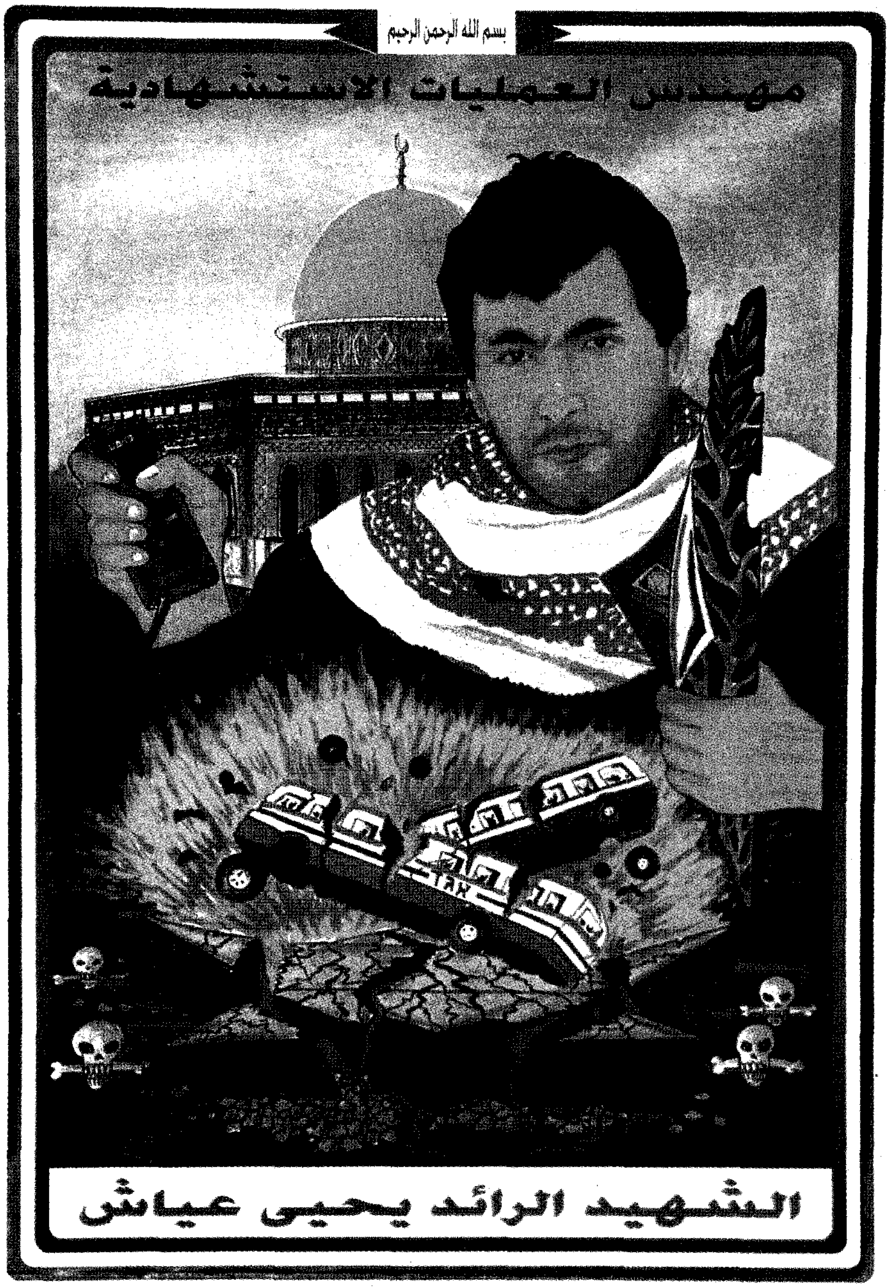
S. was one of eleven children in a middle-class family that, in 1948, had been forced to flee from Majdal to a refugee camp in Gaza, during the Arab-Israeli war that started with the creation of the State of Israel. He joined Hamas in his early teens and became a street activist. In 1989, he served two terms in Israeli prisons for intifada activity, including attacks on Israeli soldiers. One of his brothers is serving a life sentence in Israel.

I asked S. to describe his preparations for the suicide mission. "We were in a constant state of worship," he said. "We told each other that if the Israelis only knew how joyful we were they would whip us to death! Those were the happiest days of my life."

"What is the attraction of martyrdom?" I asked.

"The power of the spirit pulls us upward, while the power of material things pulls us downward," he said. "Someone bent on martyrdom becomes immune to the material pull. Our planner asked, 'What if the operation fails?' We told him, 'In any case, we get to meet the Prophet and his companions, *inshallah*.' We were floating, swimming, in the feeling that we were about to enter eternity. We had no doubts. We made an oath on the Koran, in the presence of Allah—a pledge not to waver. This jihad pledge is called *bayt al ridwan*, after the garden in Paradise that is reserved for the prophets and the martyrs. I know that there are other ways to do jihad. But this one is sweet—the sweetest. All martyrdom operations, if done for Allah's sake, hurt less than a gnat's bite!"

S. showed me a video that documented the final planning for the operation. In the grainy footage, I saw him and two other young men engaging in a ritualistic dialogue of questions and answers about the glory of martyrdom. S., who was holding a gun, identified himself as a member of al-Qassam, the military wing of Hamas, which is one of two Palestinian Islamist organizations that sponsor suicide bombings. (Islamic Jihad is the other group.) "Tomorrow, we will be martyrs," he declared, looking straight at the camera. "Only the believers know what this means. I love martyrdom." The young men and the planner then knelt and placed their right hands on the Koran. The planner said, "Are you ready? Tomorrow, you will be in Paradise."



A poster commemorating Yahya Ayyash, called "the Engineer," who developed Hamas's strategy of suicide attacks. His assassination, in 1996, set off a wave of bombings.

Since 1982, I have been an international relief worker, and after 1987 my job brought me regularly to the Middle East, especially to the Palestinian territories. In 1996, I was posted in the Gaza Strip during one of the most vicious cycles of suicide bombings. To understand why certain young men voluntarily blow themselves up in the name of Islam, I began, without official sponsorship, to research their backgrounds and the beliefs that had led them to such extreme tactics.

Finding people who were willing to discuss the details of these activities was no easy task. I was warned that my interest in trying to understand the suicide missions was dangerous. One day, I stopped to buy fruit at a roadside stand in the south of the Gaza Strip. When I asked where the mangoes had come from, the vender smiled and said, "From Beit Lid, Hadera, and Afula"—three Israeli towns that had been attacked by suicide bombers. Eventually, when the people who were observing me had assured themselves of my credentials—an important one was that I am Muslim and from Pakistan—I was allowed to meet with members of Hamas and Islamic Jihad who could help me in my research. "We are agreeing to talk to you so that you can explain the Islamic context of these operations," one man told me. "Even many in the Islamic world do not understand." Our meetings, which were arranged by intermediaries of all kinds, took place late at night, in back rooms, in small local cafés, on the sewage-strewn Gaza beach, or in prison cells. I would drive to a rendezvous point to pick up a contact, who then guided me to a meeting by way of a circuitous, untraceable route. From 1996 to 1999, I interviewed nearly two hundred and fifty people involved in the most militant camps of the Palestinian cause: volunteers who, like S., had been unable to complete their suicide missions, the families of dead bombers, and the men who trained them.

None of the suicide bombers—they ranged in age from eighteen to thirty-eight—conformed to the typical profile of the suicidal personality. None of them were uneducated, desperately poor, simple-minded, or depressed. Many were middle class and, unless they were fugitives, held paying jobs. More than half of them were refugees from what is now Israel. Two were the sons of millionaires. They all seemed to be entirely normal members of their families. They were polite and serious, and in their communities they were considered to be model youths. Most were bearded. All were deeply religious. They used Islamic terminology to express their views, but they were well informed about politics in Israel and throughout the Arab world. I was told that in order to be accepted for a suicide mission the volunteers had to be convinced of the religious legitimacy of the acts they were contemplating, as sanctioned by the divinely revealed religion of Islam. Many of these young men had memorized large sections of the Koran and were well versed in the finer points of Islamic law and practice. But their knowledge of Christianity was rooted in the medieval Crusades, and they regarded Judaism and Zionism as synonymous. When they spoke, they all tended to use the same phrases: "The West is afraid of Islam." "Allah has promised us ultimate success." "It is in the Koran." "Islamic Palestine will be liberated." And they all exhibited an unequivocal rage toward Israel. Over and over, I heard them say, "The Israelis humiliate us. They occupy our land, and deny our history."

Most of the men I interviewed requested strict anonymity; they insisted that not even their initials be noted. "With just a small detail like that, the security services could identify me," one said. Some of them were masked and met me in dark rooms or parked cars at night so that I couldn't see their faces. The majority spoke in Arabic, and they all talked matter-of-factly about the bombings, showing an unshakable conviction in the rightness of their cause and their methods. When I asked them if they had any qualms about killing innocent civilians, they would immediately respond, "The Israelis kill our children and our women. This is war, and innocent people get hurt."

They were not inclined to argue, but they were happy to discuss, far into the night, the issues and the purpose of their activities. One condition of the interviews was that, in our discussions, I not refer to their deeds as "suicide," which is forbidden in Islam. (Their preferred term is "sacred explosions.") One member of al-Qassam said, "We do not have tanks or rockets, but we have something superior—our exploding Islamic human bombs. In place of a nuclear arsenal, we are proud of our arsenal of believers."

The first suicide bombing by an Islamist Palestinian group took place in the West Bank in April, 1993; the latest was in October, 2001. Between 1993 and 1998, thirty-seven human bombs exploded; twenty-four were identified as the work of Hamas, thirteen as that of Islamic Jihad. Since the eruption of the second intifada, in September, 2000, twenty-six human bombs have exploded. Hamas claims responsibility for nineteen of them; Islamic Jihad claims seven. To date, an estimated two hundred and fifteen Israelis have been killed in these explosions, and some eighteen hundred have been injured. The attacks have taken place in shopping malls, on buses, at street corners, in cafés—wherever people congregate. Hamas and Islamic Jihad consider suicide bombings a military response to what they regard as Israeli provocations. But there is a clear correlation between the peace process and cycles of suicide attacks designed to block progress. Whenever I broached the issue, however, the Islamists denied that there was any such link.

Before September 11th, Islamist fundamentalist groups had sponsored human bombings not only in the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, and Israel but also in Afghanistan, Algeria, Argentina, Chechnya, Croatia, Kashmir, Kenya, Kuwait, Lebanon, Pakistan, Panama, Tajikistan, Tanzania, and Yemen. The targets have ranged from ordinary people to world leaders, including the Pope, who was to have been assassinated in Manila in 1995. Dressed as a priest, the assassin presumably planned to detonate himself as he kissed the Pontiff's ring.

In 1988, Dr. Fathi Shiqaqi, a founder of the Palestinian Islamic Jihad, whose assassination, in 1995, was attributed to Mossad, Israel's secret service, wrote a document in which he laid out the importance of penetrating enemy territory and set down guidelines for the use of explosives in martyrdom operations. These rules were aimed at countering religious objections to the truck bombings that had become almost routine in Lebanon in the nineteen-eighties. Shiqaqi encouraged what he called "exceptional" martyrdom as a necessary tactic in *jihad fi sabeel Allah* (striving in the cause of Allah): "We cannot achieve the goal of these operations if our mujahid"—holy warrior—"is not able to create an explosion within seconds and is unable to prevent the enemy from blocking the operation. All these results can be achieved through the explosion, which forces the mujahid not to waver, not to escape; to execute a successful operation for religion and jihad; and to destroy the morale of the enemy and plant terror into the people." This capability, he said, is "a gift from Allah."

Yahya Ayyash, an engineering student in the West Bank who became a master bomb-maker, was the first to propose that human bombs be adopted in Hamas's military operations. (The late Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin dubbed Ayyash "the Engineer," which became his nickname in the Palestinian streets.) In a letter written in the early nineties to the Hamas leadership, Ayyash recommended the use of human bombs as the most painful way to inflict damage on the Israeli occupation forces. According to a source in Hamas, Ayyash said, "We paid a high price when we used only slingshots and stones. We need to exert more pressure, make the cost of the occupation that much more expensive in human lives, that much more unbearable." The assassination of Ayyash, in January, 1996, which is widely believed to have been the work of Israeli security forces, set off a wave of retaliatory suicide bombings.

My contacts told me that, as a military objective, spreading fear among the Israelis was as important as killing them. Anwar Aziz, an Islamic Jihad member who

"Just six months ago, he was completely feral."

blew himself up in an ambulance in Gaza, in December, 1993, had often told friends, "Battles for Islam are won not through the gun but by striking fear into the enemy's heart." Another Islamist military leader said, "If our wives and children are not safe from Israeli tanks and rockets, theirs will not be safe from our human bombs."

Military commanders of Hamas and Islamic Jihad remarked that the human bomb was one of the surest ways of hitting a target. A senior Hamas leader said, "The main thing is to guarantee that a large number of the enemy will be affected. With an explosive belt or bag, the bomber has control over vision, location, and timing."

As today's weapons of mass destruction go, the human bomb is cheap. A Palestinian security official pointed out that, apart from a willing young man, all that is needed is such items as nails, gunpowder, a battery, a light switch and a short cable, mercury (readily obtainable from thermometers), acetone, and the cost of tailoring a belt wide enough to hold six or eight pockets of explosives. The most expensive item is transportation to a distant Israeli town. The total cost of a typical operation is about a hundred and fifty dollars. The sponsoring organization usually gives between three thousand and five thousand dollars to the bomber's family.

In Palestinian neighborhoods, the suicide bombers' green birds appear on posters, and in graffiti—the language of the street. Calendars are illustrated with the "martyr of the month." Paintings glorify the dead bombers in Paradise, triumphant beneath a flock of green birds. This symbol is based on a saying of the Prophet Muhammad that the soul of a martyr is carried to Allah in the bosom of the green birds of Paradise. Children who cannot read chant the names of the heroes, and make the Islamist sign for victory—right fist with raised forefinger—as they play in narrow alleys. A biography of a martyr named Muawiyya Ruqa, who exploded a rigged donkey cart near a Jewish settlement in the Gaza Strip in June, 1995, tells of how his soul was borne upward on a fragment of the bomb.

In April, 1999, I met with an Imam affiliated with Hamas, a youthful, bearded graduate of the prestigious al Azhar University, in Cairo. He explained that the first drop of blood shed by a martyr during jihad washes away his sins instantaneously. On the Day of Judgment, he will face no reckoning. On the Day of Resurrection, he can intercede for seventy of his nearest and dearest to enter Heaven; and he will have at his disposal seventy-two houris, the beautiful virgins of Paradise. The Imam took pains to explain that the promised bliss is not sensual.

Sheikh Ahmed Yassin is the spiritual leader of Hamas. He was released from an Israeli prison in 1997, and during the next two years I had many meetings with him, in his small house on an unpaved lane in a crowded quarter of Gaza. He cautioned that I would find it hard to make martyrdom comprehensible to Western readers. "I doubt that they will be willing to understand your explanations," he said. "Love of martyrdom is something deep inside the heart. But these rewards are not in themselves the goal of the martyr. The only aim is to win Allah's satisfaction. That can be done in the simplest and speediest manner by dying in the cause of Allah. And it is Allah who selects the martyrs."

There is no shortage of willing recruits for martyrdom. "Our biggest problem is the hordes of young men who beat on our doors, clamoring to be sent," a Hamas leader told me. "It is difficult to select only a few. Those whom we turn away return again and again, pestering us, pleading to be accepted."

A senior member of al-Qassam said, "The selection process is complicated by the fact that so many wish to embark on this journey of honor. When one is selected, countless others are disappointed. They must learn patience and wait until Allah calls them." He told me that there had been many attempts on his life, and he made sure that we always met at a different time and in a different place. He wore a scarf over his face; only at our last meeting, when he was saying goodbye, did he remove it. "After every massacre, every massive violation of our rights and defilement of our holy places, it is easy for us to sweep the streets for boys who want to do a martyrdom operation," he said. "Fending off the crowds who demand revenge and retaliation and insist on a human bombing operation—that becomes our biggest problem!"

Hamas and Islamic Jihad recruit youths for potential leadership positions in the organizations, but their military wings rely on volunteers for martyrdom operations. They generally reject those who are under eighteen, who are the sole wage earners in their families, or who are married and have family responsibilities. If two brothers ask to join, one is turned away. The planner keeps a close eye on the volunteer's self-discipline, noting whether he can be discreet among friends and observing his piety in the mosque. (A cleric will sometimes recommend a notably zealous youth for martyrdom.) During the week before the operation, two "assistants" are delegated to stay with the potential martyr at all times. They report any signs of doubt, and if the young man seems to waver, a senior trainer will arrive to bolster his resolve. The father of Anwar Sukkar, who, with his friend Salah Shakir, carried out an explosion in Beit Lid in 1995, told me with pride, "Even after Salah saw my son ripped to shreds, he did not flinch. He waited before exploding himself, in order to cause additional deaths."

A planner for Islamic Jihad said that his organization carefully scrutinizes the motives of a potential bomber: "We ask this young man, and we ask ourselves, why he wishes so badly to become a human bomb. What are his real motives? Our questions are aimed at clarifying first and foremost for the boy himself his real reasons and the strength of his commitment. Even if he is a longtime member of our group and has always wanted to become a martyr, he needs to be very clear that in such an operation there is no drawing back. Preparation bolsters his conviction, which supports his certitude. It removes fear."

A member of Hamas explained the preparation: "We focus his attention on Paradise, on being in the presence of Allah, on meeting the Prophet Muhammad, on interceding for his loved ones so that they, too, can be saved from the agonies of Hell, on the houris, and on fighting the Israeli occupation and removing it from the Islamic trust that is Palestine." (A volunteer whom the Palestinian Authority arrested before he could carry out a suicide bombing offered this description of the immediacy of Paradise: "It is very, very near—right in front of our eyes. It lies beneath the thumb. On the other side of the detonator.")

One of the "technical considerations" that may be taken into account in the final selection of a candidate for martyrdom is the ability to pass, at least temporarily, as an Israeli Jew. In Islamic Jihad's first human-bomb operation, in September, 1993, the martyr Ala'a al Kahlout shaved his beard, donned a cap and dark glasses, and dressed in shorts and a T-shirt before carrying his bomb onto a bus in Ashdod.

I asked one planner about the problem of fear. "The boy has left that stage far behind," he said. "The fear is not for his own safety or for his impending death. It does not come from lack of confidence in his ability to press the trigger. It is awe, produced by the situation. He has never done this before and, *inshallah*, will never do it again! It comes from his fervent desire for success, which will propel him into the presence of Allah. It is anxiety over the possibility of something going wrong and denying him his heart's wish. The outcome, remember, lies in Allah's hands."

I was told the story of a young Palestinian, M., by two men who, at different times, had been his cellmates in Israeli prisons. In September, 1993, in a safe house just outside Jerusalem, M. had performed ritual ablution, said his prayers, and set off on his bombing mission. He had boarded a bus—one on the same route on which S.'s bomb had failed to explode two months earlier. All he had to do was unzip his bag of explosives and press the detonator. "But at the moment he was to press the button he forgot Paradise," one of his former cellmates recalled. "He felt a split second of fear, a slight hesitation. To bolster himself, he recited from the Koran. Refreshed and strengthened, he again began to think of Paradise. When he felt ready, he tried again. But the detonator did not func-

BASKING SHARK

All below was space,
plunging rock, a few
coasting fulmars, then
the heave of water, almost
supernaturally clear.

Once, from a beach,
I'd sensed too much
density in a wave,
a diving fin, but to lie
on a cliff edge, be shown

the whole, reposed
ore-heavy body and head,
its great pelagic tail
adjusting gently
to a backwash,

was to be granted the sudden
Earth, photographed
above gravity: clever,
lithe, aware of her
furtherance and plan.

Behind me, peat moor
careered inland. I gripped
sweet rock; but a wind
breathed then, the surface
glittered, and broke up.

—*Kathleen Jamie*

tion. He prayed to himself, ‘Please, Allah, let me succeed.’ But still it did not work, not even the third time, when he kept his finger pressed firmly on the knob. Recognizing that there was a technical problem, he got off the bus at the next stop, returned the bag to the planner, and went home.” (The Israeli security services subsequently arrested M. in another attack, and he is currently in prison.)

Many of the volunteers and the members of their family told stories of persecution, including beatings and torture, suffered at the hands of Israeli forces. I asked whether some of the bombers acted from feelings of personal revenge. “No,” a trainer told me. “If that alone motivates the candidate, his martyrdom will not be acceptable to Allah. It is a military response, not an individual’s bitterness, that drives an operation. Honor and dignity are very important in our culture. And when we are humiliated we respond with wrath.”

Al khaliyya al istishhadiyya, which is often mistranslated as “suicide cell”—its proper translation is “martyrdom cell”—is the basic building block of operations. Generally, each cell consists of a leader and two or three young men. When a candidate is placed in a cell, usually after months, if not years, of religious studies, he is assigned the lofty title of *al shaheed al hayy*, “the living martyr.” He is also referred to as “he who is waiting for martyrdom.” A young man named Ayman Juma Radi, whose self-explosion, in December, 1994, was delayed by a few days, wrote a message in his diary, in which he glumly signed himself “the deferred martyr.”

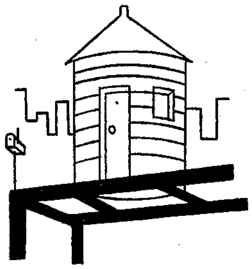
Each cell is tightly compartmentalized and secret. Cell members do not discuss their affiliation with their friends or family, and even if two of them know each other in normal life, they are not aware of the other’s membership in the same cell. (Only the leader is known to both.) Each cell, which is dissolved after the operation has been completed, is given a name from the Koran or from Islamic history.

In most cases, the young men undergo intensified spiritual exercises, including prayers and recitations of the Koran. Usually, the trainer encourages the candidate to read six particular chapters of the Koran: Baqara, Al Imran, Anfal, Tawba, Rahman, and Asr, which feature such themes as jihad, the birth of the nation of Islam, war, Allah’s favors, and the importance of faith. Religious lectures last from two to four hours each day. The living martyr goes on lengthy fasts. He spends much of the night praying. He pays off all his debts, and asks for forgiveness for actual or perceived offenses. If a candidate is on the wanted list of the Israeli security services, he goes underground, moving from one hiding place to another.

In the days before the operation, the candidate prepares a will on paper, audiocassette, or video, sometimes all three. The video testaments, which are shot against a background of the sponsoring organization’s banner and slogans, show the living martyr reciting the Koran, posing with guns and bombs, exhorting his comrades to follow his example, and extolling the virtues of jihad. The wills emphasize the voluntary basis of the mission. “This is my free decision, and I urge all of you to follow me,” one young bomber, Muhammad Abu Hashem, said in a recorded testament before blowing himself up, in 1995, in retaliation for the assassination of Fathi Shiqaqi.

The young man repeatedly watches the video of himself, as well as the videos of his predecessors. “These videos encourage him to confront death, not fear it,” one trainer told me. “He becomes intimately familiar with what he is about to do. Then he can greet death like an old friend.”

Just before the bomber sets out on his final journey, he performs a ritual ablution, puts on clean clothes, and tries to attend at least one communal prayer at a mosque. He says the traditional Islamic prayer that is customary before battle, and he asks Allah to forgive his sins and to bless his mission. He puts a Koran in his left breast pocket, above the heart, and he straps the explosives around his waist or picks up a briefcase or a bag containing the bomb. The planner bids him farewell with the words “May Allah be with you, may Allah give you success so that you achieve Paradise.” The would-be martyr responds, “*Inshallah*, we will meet in Paradise.”



Hours later, as he presses the detonator, he says, “*Allahu akbar*”—“Allah is great. All praise to Him.”

The operation doesn’t end with the explosion and the many deaths. Hamas and Islamic Jihad distribute copies of the martyr’s audiocassette or video to the media and to local organizations as a record of their success and encouragement to other young men. His act becomes the subject of sermons in mosques, and provides material for leaflets, posters, videos, demonstrations, and extensive coverage in the media. Graffiti on walls in the martyr’s neighborhood praise his heroism. Aspiring martyrs perform mock reënactments of the operation, using models of exploding cars and buses. The sponsoring organization distributes cassettes of chants and songs honoring the good soldier. When a member of al-Qassam blew up himself and his victims in April, 1994, in retaliation for the massacre of Muslim worshippers in Hebron by the Israeli extremist Baruch Goldstein, he was commemorated in an anthem that ushered in a new popular genre of “revenge songs.”

The bomber’s family and the sponsoring organization celebrate his martyrdom with festivities, as if it were a wedding. Hundreds of guests congregate at the house to offer congratulations. The hosts serve the juices and sweets that the young man specified in his will. Often, the mother will ululate in joy over the honor that Allah has bestowed upon her family.

But there is grief, too. I asked the mother of Ribhi Kahlout, a young man in the Gaza Strip, who had blown himself up, in November, 1995, what she would have done if she had known what her son was planning to do. “I would have taken a cleaver, cut open my heart, and stuffed him deep inside,” she said. “Then I would have sewn it up tight to keep him safe.” ♦

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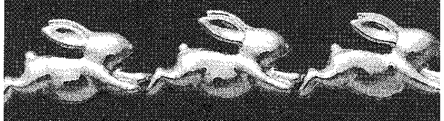

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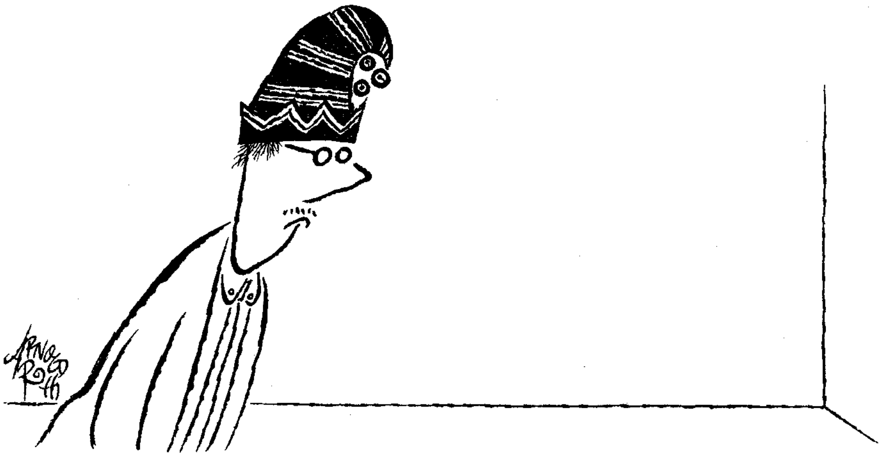

The urge to laugh is among the most unruly of human instincts. Guffawing should always be prohibited, of course, but to help alleviate any current uncertainty about when it is permissible to laugh, closely follow the recommendations below.

1. Subjects rated safe and harmless when utilized for humor relief:

—British Royal Family
—Canada/Canadians
—Collins, Joan
—Comb-overs
—Duck walks into a bar
—Ford, Gerald R.
—Farmer's daughter
—Gabor, Zsa Zsa
—Gore, Al
—Hairpieces, wigs
—Kids today
—Travelling salesmen
—Weather

Observe that these are national guidelines. For regional humor, preface your joke, wisecrack, or limerick with a relevant geographical reference—"A fellow from Cleveland tells me . . . ," "There once was a hairpiece from Tulsa . . . ," etc.

2. Note: An estimated seventy-five per cent of all books of humor that conform to current laughter-safety guidelines are now out-of-print. Owners of summer cottages may wish to conduct under-bed searches for any book by Erma Bombeck, Andy Rooney, Art Buchwald, Dave Barry, Bill Cosby, or Tim Allen.

3. Commonly asked laughter questions:

Q: How can I pull off a successful dinner party in today's new humor-restrictive atmosphere?

A: Easy, if you act as a "laughter captain," poised to nip irony, sarcasm, and poor taste in the bud by instantly interjecting, in a loud, firm voice, a laughter-neutralizing agent. For example:

"Well, I hear Julia Roberts has a new boyfriend."

"Now, how about those [losing sports team]?"

"Hey, anybody see tomorrow's weather forecast?"

If you are unsure about your proficiency as a laughter captain, invite a guest with no sense of humor to provide laughter-neutralizing agents.

Q: I still know how to laugh, but I don't know where to do it!

A: You can't go wrong laughing in bed, at TV sitcoms, during non-conference telephone calls, around children, in

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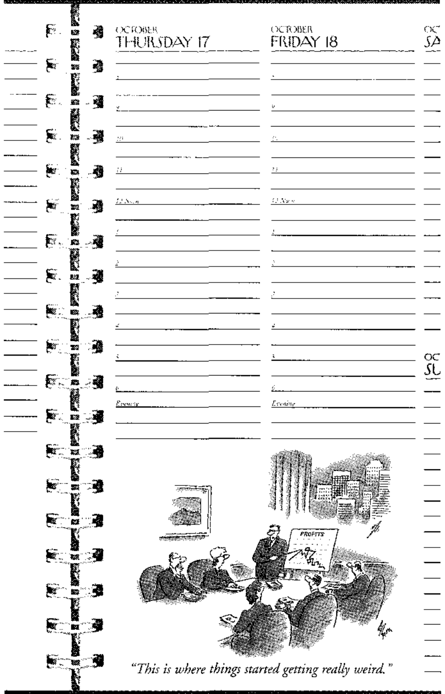

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locker rooms, and while shaving, driving alone, walking the dog, or scaling fish.

4. Ethnic jokes: Canada, Belgium, New Zealand, Paraguay *only*.

5. Laughter-safety precautions:

—Avoid associating with "cutups" and "smart-asses." If you are a cutup or smart-ass, you may have to associate exclusively with bankers, academics, and corporate executives to induce behavioral change.

—If you feel a snide putdown or a Wildean epigram coming on, hurry to the bathroom, write it on a piece of paper, and flush it down the toilet.

—If someone starts telling an unsafe story or joke, look the person square in the eye and say, "You think that's funny?" This will stop the joke-teller in his tracks, allowing you to seize control and quickly dilute the laugh stream. "Three kittens in a basket—now, *that's* funny!"

—Always know exactly where the laughter is heading. It should invite responses that lead to a "laugh cluster" of harmless jokes on similar subjects. Sample safe laugh clusters: home-repair projects gone awry; snow; failed dieting efforts; pet antics; dry-cleaning mixups; cooking disasters; Jackson, Michael.

6. Body-language precautions: If you must tell a joke, avoid arm-waving, funny dialects, and other "joke-selling" techniques. Never "crack up" at someone else's joke outside the privacy of your own home.

7. Laughter traps: The office water cooler, the corner bar, the poker table, and other communal spots are virtual breeding grounds for unnecessary laughter. Steer "life of the party" types to museums, philosophy lectures, and operas instead.

8. Knock-knock jokes: Try out your knock-knock joke first on at least three children under six years of age. If they don't laugh, it is probably "clever," i.e., unsafe.

This completes the list of laughter-safety guidelines. Have a ball! ♦

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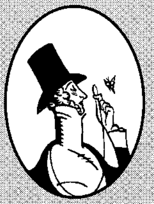

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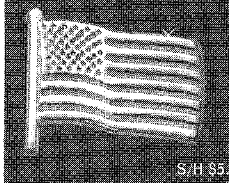

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YOU CAN'T *SAY* THAT

The networks play word games.

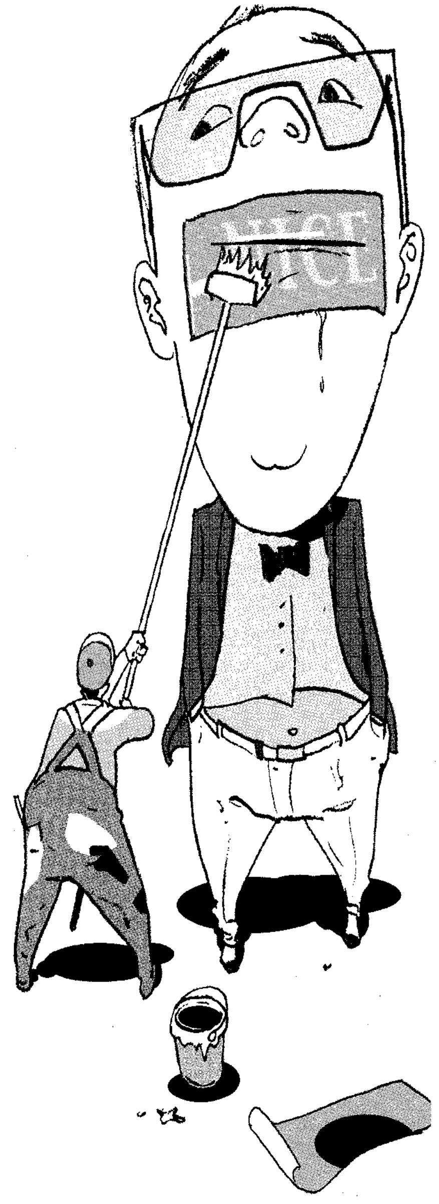
BY TAD FRIEND

As a co-creator of the television series “N.Y.P.D. Blue,” the writer-producer Steven Bochco has done more than his share to broaden the vocabulary promulgated over America's favorite living-room appliance. This season, Bochco has a new legal drama, “Philly,” on ABC, and he decided to use its première episode as the occasion for another breakthrough. For the first time, the barnyard epithet of Nixon White House fame would be heard on a network show. In the “Philly” episode, a scrappy defense attorney who has been put in jail for a few hours is told by a fellow-prisoner that one of her clients killed a man. “Bullshit!” she says. “Bullshit?” the prisoner replies. “I saw it happen.” Whereupon the network would cut to a commercial and boils would break out on man and beast; and, after the boils, there would be thunder and hail, and, after the hail, swarms of locusts.

That was the plan, anyway. But when I spoke with Bochco shortly before the episode aired, in late September, he'd just got off the phone with Alan Braverman, ABC's head of legal affairs, who told him that the network's Standards and Practices department considered the word “unacceptably coarse.”

Bochco persisted. “I told Alan, ‘The audience that watches my “N.Y.P.D. Blue” and hears “scumbag,” “douche bag,” and “prick” isn't going to reach for the remote if it hears “bullshit.” When you're surrounded by junkies and whores in a jailhouse bullpen, the word just goes by naturally. Furthermore, it's not about this one word; it's about trying to entertain adults at 10 P.M., when they can easily flip to “The Sopranos.” ’ ” According to Bochco, Braverman replied, “We do live in the age of ‘The Sopranos,’ but we also live in the world of restrictions placed by our advertisers and by the government. These are gut calls, but this word crosses a line.”

ABC employs twenty-seven Standards and Practices censors, or “editors,” and the other broadcast networks have similar staffs. Most Standards editors have experience as lawyers, teachers, and members of the clergy. They scrutinize every show and commercial for vulgarity, sexuality, violence, and subject matter that could violate F.C.C. standards of obscenity, community standards of indecency, and, particularly, corporate standards of comfort. (They also insure that dramas present both sides of controversial subjects like gun control, that game shows are not rigged, and that “reality” shows are more or less unstaged.) A Standards department reports not to the entertainment division but to the corporate executives; it is the superego that shushes the programmers' noisy id. Bryce Zabel, who produced “M.A.N.T.I.S.,” a 1995 Fox show about a black superhero, says, “The creative executives would ask me to up the ‘action’ quotient”—car chases, “run and jumps” (to a helicopter's dangling rope ladder, say), and “sneak and creeps” (gunfights in parking garages)—“and then Standards would question those very things.”



Without the approval of Standards and Practices, nothing goes on the air.

ISTVAN BANYAI

Without the approval of the Standards people, nothing goes on the air. They are the ones who insist that on-screen lesbian kisses be “romantic” but not “passionate” (i.e., no tongue); that nasty words be presented in an “empowering” context (“Who you callin' a bitch?”); that guns be aimed at people's heads only in hostage or war situations; that role models do not smoke; that we never see “instructional activities” like rolling a joint or cutting a line of cocaine; and that if someone does take drugs he faces “consequences”—if not arrest, rehab, AIDS, or death, then at least a weepy speech from a concerned friend. Standards departments limit the range of the characters we see—there are few jolly adulterers or lovable anarchists in prime time—and they try to keep stories uplifting. David Chase, the creator of “The Sopranos,” recalls that when he produced a made-for-television movie called “Off the Minnesota Strip” for ABC, in 1980, Standards wanted him to insert a soupy version of Beethoven's “Ode to Joy” over his ending, in which a fifteen-year-old girl heads off down the Sunset Strip, evidently to become a hooker. “This is a pro-social job,” Olivia Cohen-Cutler, the head of ABC's Standards department, told me. “We don't want evil to triumph.”

The constantly shifting standards of Hollywood's Standards departments provide a sharper picture of mainstream American mores than any Gallup poll, Presidential campaign, or John Irving novel. After the terrorist attacks of September 11th, Standards departments examined every show and commercial for material that could now seem raw or insensitive. Among many other redactions, NBC cancelled a "Law & Order" miniseries about a terrorist attack on New York City; the première of "Third Watch," which dealt with a blackout and subsequent unrest in New York; and a repeat episode of "Will & Grace" which contained a few jokes about airport security. CBS pulled an episode of "The Agency" in which the C.I.A. fights an anthrax threat, and cut an exchange from "The Ellen Show" in which Ellen DeGeneres's character says, "My business collapsed" and her mother replies, "Well, thank your lucky stars you weren't there at the time." Fox snipped a bin Laden joke from a "Family Guy" rerun and cut scenes of a terrorist blowing up a plane from the première of a new drama, "24." Fox's head of Standards, Roland McFarland, told me, "The President has an approval rating of ninety per cent. So we won't be taking any more satirical cheap shots at him at this time."

In the last decade, Standards departments have become more tolerant of sex and foul language, but they have cracked down on violence and become more insistent about the politically correct presentation of minorities. Lately, however, they seem to be swinging wildly back and forth between allowing everything and allowing nothing. As recently as 1990, television critics and watchdog groups were outraged when CBS permitted a six-year-old girl on the sitcom "Uncle Buck" to say, "You suck!" Since then, "suck," "fart," "crap," and "friggin' " have all made their way into the network vernacular, and on the pilot episodes of this fall's new shows you could see a man and a wolf-woman engage in topless quasi bestiality (the CBS drama "Wolf Lake"), hear a five-year-old girl announce, "I have a vagina" (the ABC sitcom "According to Jim"; a network spokesman insists that she actually says "bagina"), and even be inadvertently exposed to the NBC comedy "Emeril."

Yet producers of situation comedies that air at eight o'clock—a time formerly known as "the family hour"—still routinely receive memos from Standards decreeing that "the number of 'hells' and 'damns' must be cut by one-half." Even if only three per cent of a show's audience gets upset by a particular word or image, that's still a population the size of Salt Lake City that's up in arms. (In fact, it usually is Salt Lake City.) The goal of Standards is to make sure nobody's mad, ever.

This confused state of affairs was exemplified on CBS's "The Late Show with David Letterman" in May, when Letterman repeatedly showed a clip from CBS's live broadcast of "On Golden Pond" which featured the word "bullshit." When Letterman used the word nine times himself—to describe his feelings about not being able to use the word—network censors bleeped the second syllable every time. Martin D. Franks, the executive vice-president to whom CBS Program Practices reports, explained to me that " 'On Golden Pond' has some classic status, so the term wasn't lazy or exploitative, as it might be if used simply to titillate on one of our eight-o'clock sitcoms." Why, then, couldn't Letterman use the term later at night? "I would say to David, 'Not to use the word in "Golden Pond" would be a compromise of creative freedom, but you haven't convinced me that the word is vital to your creative freedom.' "

As it happens, the tussle between Bochco and ABC over the word "bullshit" was satirized in advance in June, on a "South Park" episode that used the word "shit" for the first time on Comedy Central—and used it a hundred and sixty-two times. Comedy Central's advertisers weren't bothered by the episode, and programmers at other networks became more eager than ever to do away with Standards departments. The six-year-old UPN is the first modern network not to have such a department, and Dean Valentine, its president and C.E.O., dismisses his competitors' Standards and Practices guidelines as "the accumulated stupidities of the years."

"There's a huge struggle going on," Jeff Zucker, the president of NBC Entertainment, told me. "I'm not saying we should use 'fuck' and show frontal nudity, but standards shouldn't even be where they were a few years ago. I have weekly discussions with Alan Wurtzel"—the network's head of Standards and Practices—"in which I try to loosen the floodgates and he tries to dam them up. We're now arguing over the word 'asshole' in a pilot. I'm not winning."

"It's a tonnage issue," Wurtzel told me. "Last year, HBO became the creative gold standard, so all our drama guys are saying, 'Why can't we be like "The Sopranos"?' and all our sitcom guys are

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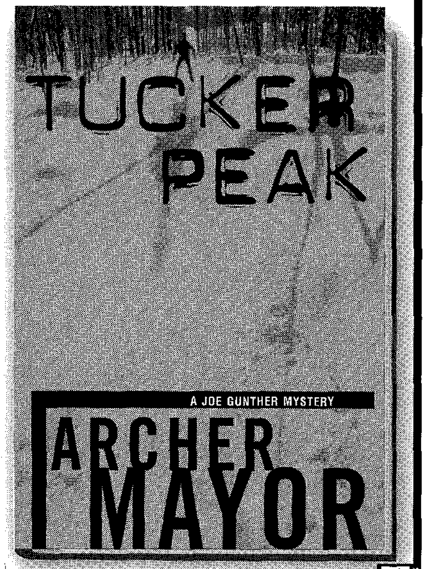

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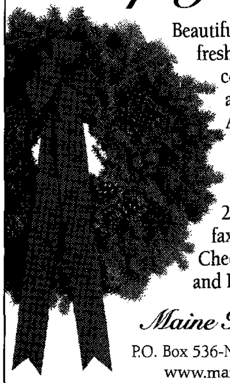

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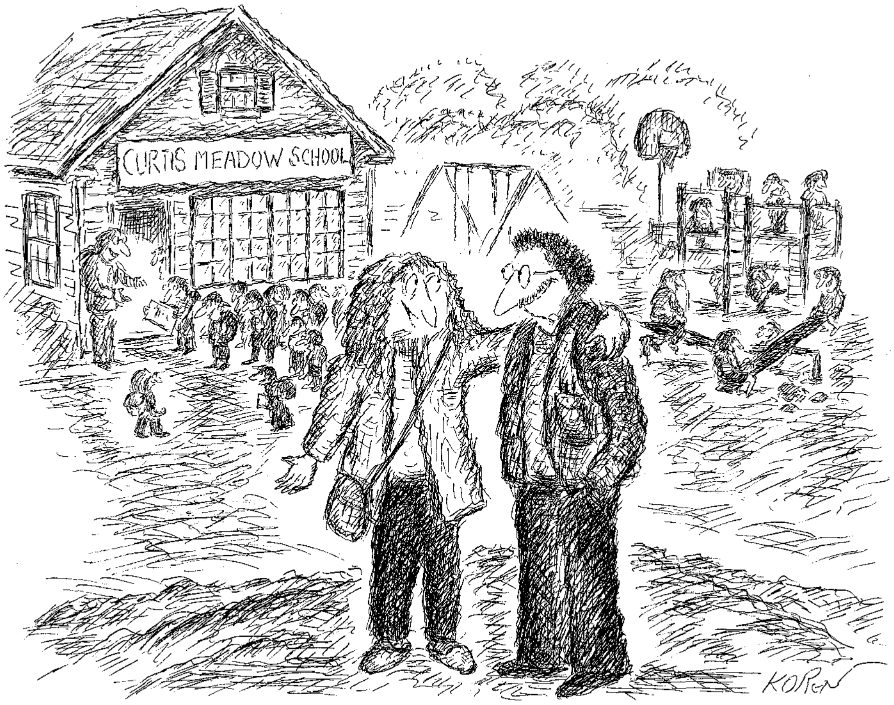

"There's my very first school—where I learned how to hug."

saying, 'Why can't we be like "Sex and the City"?' One 'asshole' is not going to cause the fall of the republic, but do we want to become known as the 'asshole' network?" On the other hand, Wurtzel acknowledged, Standards has to evolve: "If we're too far behind the culture, viewers will feel 'E.R.' and 'Friends' are getting stodgy, and they'll leave. But if we're too far ahead advertisers will get nervous, and they'll leave. Either way, we lose."

In 1953, Rod Serling, who later created "The Twilight Zone," wrote, "Because TV is a mass medium, you have to be governed by mass medium taboos. Easy on sex. Easy on violence. Nix on religion. Gently does it on controversial themes." Television is to the culture as the seventies was to the sixties—not the locomotive of change but the caboose.

This timidity has its roots in the way television entertainment began. In the early nineteen-fifties, most shows, such as "Texaco Star Theatre," were sponsored by a single advertiser who had enormous power over the program. The Mars Company, which sponsored "Circus Boy," frowned on references to competing snacks such as cookies and ice cream. When the American Gas Association presented "Judgment at Nuremberg" live on CBS's "Playhouse 90," in 1959, it insisted that the word "gas" be cut from the script, leading to the suggestion that millions of Jews died in ". . . chambers."

More recently, Standards departments have been affected by a different sort of economic imperative. The most startling show in the past decade has been "N.Y.P.D. Blue," which débuted on ABC in 1993, at a time when the network was flailing. After a year of negotiations, Steven Bochco persuaded ABC to let him use vulgarities thirty-seven times in each episode, as long as he confined himself to an agreed-upon glossary of such words as "balls," "bastard," "dickhead," "fat ass," "johnson," "prick," "screwing," "scumbag," and "tits." He could show breasts from the side (Standards combed the show's footage frame by frame, looking for a forbidden peep of nipple), and dorsal but not frontal nudity, and he could suggest, but never show, intercourse.

Fifty-seven affiliates refused to air the first episode, and ABC couldn't charge its full ad rate on the show for years. "The networks wouldn't let anyone follow my lead, out of fear," Bochco said. "But fear is also why ABC agreed to make the show—they allowed us latitude because they were getting killed in the ratings. It wasn't

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an artistic decision; it was an economic decision. It’s never an artistic decision.”

By watching television carefully, you can almost hear what Standards has taken out of a show, or see why risqué material was left in. A few basic rules clarify how a show’s content reveals its place in the network’s estimation.

(1) The more times you hear “ass,” the more successful the show is. “Ass” is the most common vulgarity on network television: according to the Parents Television Council, it can be heard 1.04 times per hour on eight-o’clock shows. When “Martin” first aired, on Fox, in 1992, the sitcom’s producers were permitted one “ass” per half-hour episode. As “Martin” became successful, the show’s producers were allowed two, then three, then unlimited “ass”es. (On a drama pilot at another network this year, producers were permitted three “ass”es, or 1.5 “ass”es per half hour, which indicates some mild “ass” inflation.)

(2) If a show invites you to picture a character’s genitalia, it’s a proven hit. In the second season of “Friends,” Standards vetoed a story line about the girls fashioning an artificial foreskin for Joey, who was up for an acting role that, for reasons it would be tedious to describe, required an uncircumcised male. This spring, in its seventh season, “Friends” did the foreskin plot. And the “master of your domain” episode on “Seinfeld,” about masturbation, ran in the show’s sixth season.

(3) A program that shows large expanses of skin makes a lot of money for the network. “When Standards raised a number of wardrobe issues on ‘Charlie’s Angels’ in the seventies,” Fred Silverman, who was then the president of ABC Entertainment, says, “I’d take them up with my boss, Fred Pierce, and remind him that the show was doing a fifty share. And he’d say, ‘Let ’em jiggle!’ ”

(4) If a drama has commercials for Jhirmack shampoo and the Thighmaster, that’s a sure indication that its subject was so controversial that the regular advertisers pulled out. A few weeks ago, Sears and Federal Express withdrew their ads from ABC’s “Politically Incorrect” after Bill Maher, the host, suggested that America’s long-distance missile attacks were “cowardly.” Recent shows ran ads for Trojan condoms and Craftmatic Adjustable Beds.

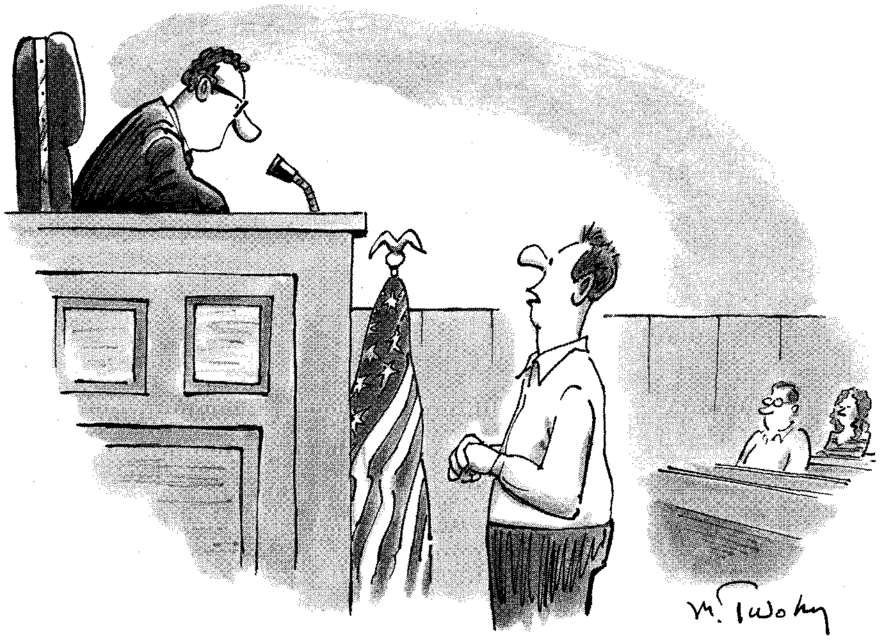
(5) When a long-running drama is short on off-color language or risky topics, you can assume that the Standards people think it’s no good. “Last year, we let Aaron Sorkin use the word ‘prick’ on ‘The West Wing,’ ” Alan Wurtzel, at NBC, told me, “but only because it is clearly a quality show, and because the characters had been established for two years.” A former NBC executive told me, “The producers of ‘Pretender’ and ‘Profiler,’ two extremely pedestrian shows, would always say, ‘They used “ballbuster” on “Homicide”—can’t we do it?’ We’d say politely, ‘Your show ain’t “Homicide.” ’ ”

Standards departments typically have vague written guidelines but no lists of forbidden words or proscribed scenarios. Theirs is an oral culture, one whose strictures are handed down like Inuit tribal lore. The fiats that emerge from the Standards editors’ deliberations are scrupulous, nuanced, and often hilarious. The producers of the CBS drama “Delvecchio” were once told to amend the term “rat doo-doo” to “rat doo”; when a hunchback got knifed on “Get Smart,” the censors decreed that “it would be better if the knife were to go into the part of his back which isn’t hunched.”

Writers see Standards editors as Emily Posts who cling to archaic rules; the editors see themselves as Emily Dickinsons who strive to preserve a cultural standard. “We’re accused of limiting creativity,” a Standards editor told me. “But I feel we’re challenging creativity. Instead of using ‘damn’ eleven times, can’t you come up with some other word?” Censor-writer colloquies would delight William Safire: does “scumbag” connote a repellent individual, or will older viewers recall that it originally meant a condom? “Schmuck” means a jerk in Los Angeles, but is it still a synonym for “penis” in New York? “Dick” and “pussy” are now sometimes allowed, but only as insults (it may thus be permissible to say “You’re a dick,” but never “Your dick . . .”).

A few years ago, on a “Mad About You” episode in which Paul filmed a documentary about horses, viewers saw a stallion and a mare coupling. “One horse had a huge erection, and if you’re eight years old it’s scary to see that,” an NBC Standards executive says. “We got a lot of flak, and we deserved it. We’d broken the covenant not to surprise the audience.”

That covenant is the one great unspoken standard. In 1997, when Ellen Morgan kissed another woman on “Ellen,” ABC put an “adult content” warning on the episode. An ABC Standards editor maintains, “We put the warning on because Ellen was making a big change. She had been asexual, the crazy single girl, and all of a sudden she became sexual.” Yet ABC was clearly skittish about this particular change. The executive producer of “Ellen,” Tim Doyle, says, “I



“Requesting a postponement, Your Honor, until the mood of the country is less pro-metermaid.”

framed the Standards note saying, 'It is unacceptable for Laurie to kiss Ellen here. Please substitute another way for her to express her feeling of togetherness.' "

A forthcoming episode of Fox's "24" also features a gay interlude, and Standards responded with a memo: "The businessman could be startled with his shirt halfway off, or something similar . . . but we cannot accept any inference that Rogow is/was going down on this guy." Pivoting, with somewhat less concern, to deal with violence, the memo went on to say, "Please use good taste when depicting Bridgit getting hit by the 'long-distance, silenced shot to the head.' "

Standards departments pay particular attention to impiety. Aaron Sorkin, the creator of "The West Wing," said, "What has surprised me most about television is that Standards and Practices made it very clear that I will be able to say 'motherfucker' on the air before I can take the Lord's name in vain. They fear that religious groups will aggressively boycott our show." In one episode last year, President Bartlet exploded about being bested by a "damn street gang." "It didn't ring true," Sorkin said. "I originally wrote 'goddamn street gang.' In the movies, it would have been 'fucking street gang.' I'm fighting to get NBC to loosen the reins, and I feel 'bullshit' should be allowed, occasionally— 'That's crap' doesn't play."

The rules of engagement in this routine warfare are understood by everyone involved. Standards editors often tell one another, "Give them seven notes so you can negotiate." The writers, in turn, put "asshole" in the script a few times as "censor bait," knowing they'll have to cut it but hoping to keep two "bitch"es and a "balls" in exchange.

The latest injunction at the networks has been to present minorities as role models. This effort has been so successful that the black boss and the black judge are now clichés. Unfortunately, this "advance" is largely a retreat into safety. In 1994, the producers of the Fox sitcom "Monty" were told that a character in the pilot could not get food poisoning from a Chinese restaurant. He also could not get it from an Italian restaurant. He could, however, get it from a restaurant.

This January, NBC apologized to the National Puerto Rican Coalition for a "Law & Order" episode based on an incident of mayhem during New York City's Puerto Rican Day parade, and said it would not rerun the episode. Six months later, NBC apologized to the Media Action Network for Asian Americans after Sarah Silverman made a joke about "Chinks" on "Late Night with Conan O'Brien," and said it would cut the word from reruns. Alan Wurtzel, of NBC, says, "We understand that this joke was designed to be a satirical comment on racism. But, to the Asian-American community, 'Chinks' is equivalent to 'niggers' or 'kikes.' Our most difficult Standards issue is racial stereotyping—comedy producers say, 'Don't you have a sense of humor?' and drama producers say, 'But this situation exists in real life!' " Many producers believe that a show like "All in the Family," in which Archie Bunker inveighed against "spics, spades, Chinks, [and] Hebes" in the first episode, would never make it on the air today.

Television's fundamental internal conflict is played out through the triumphs and defeats of the Standards and Practices departments. That conflict is not between art and commerce but between commerce and commerce. Standards' mandate is to help the network gain viewers (and thus advertisers) without going so far that it loses viewers (and thus advertisers). Fred Silverman, who in his long career helped lead the entertainment division of each of the three major networks, predicts, "If UPN has real success, and it needs to protect what it has, it'll get a Standards department." And yet Standards and Practices' insistence on presenting "commonly accepted values" also helps explain why the networks have lost half of their audience in the last fifteen years. Standards departments throw the baby out with the bathwater. Then the networks wonder why it's so quiet in the tub.

And so Steven Bochco's first episode of "Philly" did not contain the word "bullshit" after all. Instead, the defense attorney said, "No way!" "I'll revisit the matter if the show's a hit," Bochco told me. "Because then the network will be terrified to piss me off. And I guarantee you Aaron Sorkin would win his struggles with NBC if he got a really, really bad case of writer's block. We're going to win the 'bullshit' battle before long, because either I, or Aaron, or someone will be willing to be a real"—he paused, seeking the mot juste—"asshole." ♦

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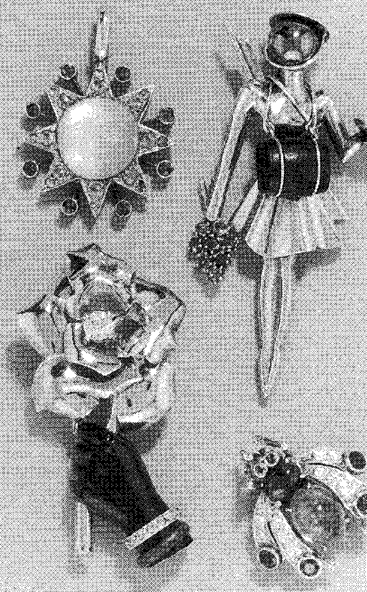

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ANNALS OF RELIGION

THE REVOLT OF ISLAM

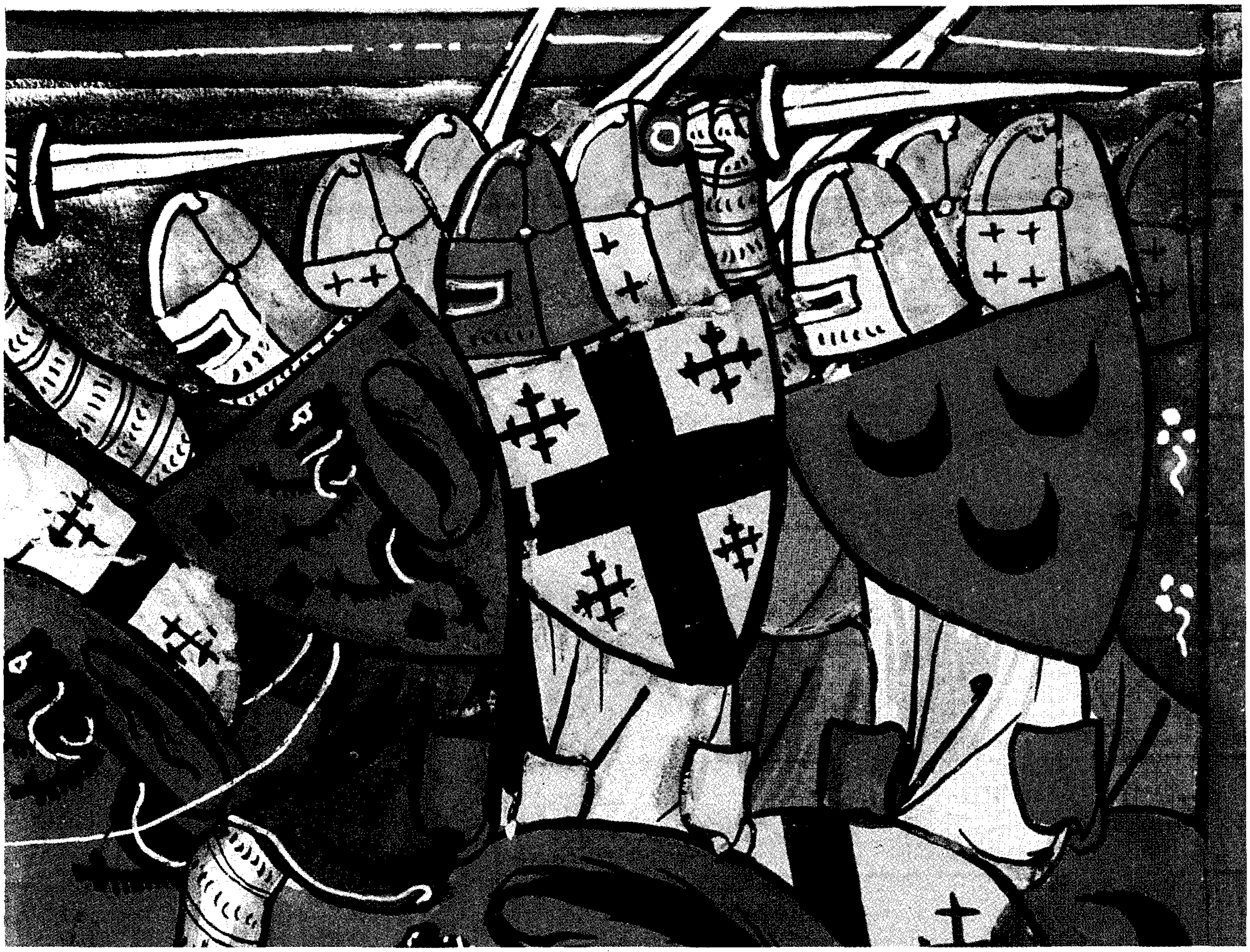
When did the conflict with the West begin, and how could it end?

BY BERNARD LEWIS

I—MAKING HISTORY

President Bush and other Western politicians have taken great pains to make it clear that the war in which we are engaged is a war against terrorism—not a war against Arabs, or, more generally, against Muslims, who are urged to join us in this struggle against our common enemy. Osama bin Laden's message is the opposite. For bin Laden and those who follow him, this is a religious war, a war for Islam and against infidels, and therefore, inevitably, against the United States, the greatest power in the world of the infidels.

In his pronouncements, bin Laden makes frequent references to history. One of the most dramatic was his mention, in the October 7th videotape, of the "humiliation and disgrace" that Islam has suffered for "more than eighty years." Most American—and, no doubt, European—observers of the Middle Eastern scene began an anxious search for something that had happened "more than eighty years" ago, and came up with various answers. We can be fairly sure that bin Laden's Muslim listeners—the people he was addressing—picked up the allusion immediately and appreciated its significance. In 1918, the Ottoman sultanate, the last of the great Muslim empires, was finally defeated—its capital, Constantinople, occupied, its sovereign held captive, and much of its territory partitioned between the victorious British and French Empires. The Turks eventually succeeded in liberating their homeland, but they did so not in the name of Islam but through a secular nationalist movement. One of their first acts, in November, 1922, was to abolish the sultanate. The Ottoman sovereign was not only a sultan, the ruler of a specific state; he was also widely recognized as the caliph, the head of all Sunni Islam, and the last in a line of such rulers that dated back to the death of the Prophet Mu-



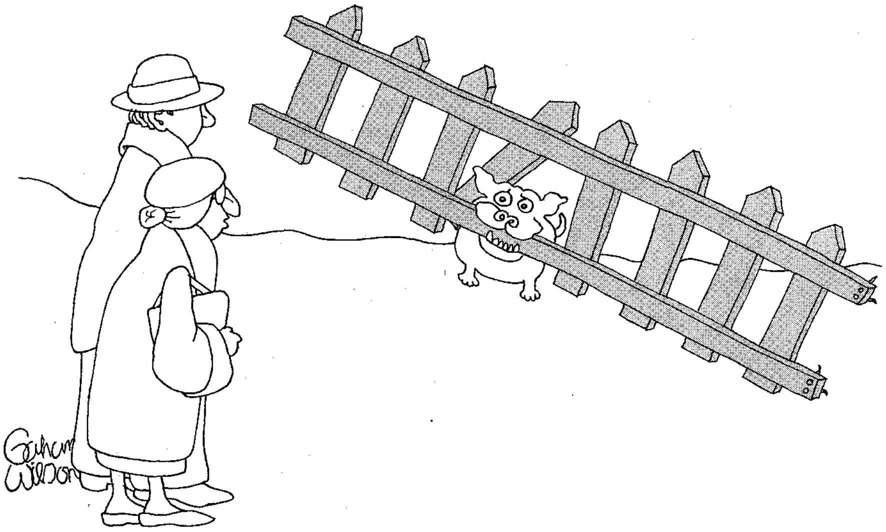
A scene from the Crusades. For Middle Easterners, the end of the Cold War was simply a new phase in the old imperial game.

DETAIL FROM "LI ROMANS DE GODEFROY DE BOUILLON ET DE SALEHADIN" BIBLIOTHÈQUE NATIONALE/BRIDGEMAN ARCHIVE

hammad, in 632 A.D. After a brief experiment with a separate caliph, the Turks, in March, 1924, abolished the caliphate, too. During its nearly thirteen centuries, the caliphate had gone through many vicissitudes, but it remained a potent symbol of Muslim unity, even identity, and its abolition, under the double assault of foreign imperialists and domestic modernists, was felt throughout the Muslim world.

Historical allusions such as bin Laden's, which may seem abstruse to many Americans, are common among Muslims, and can be properly understood only within the context of Middle Eastern perceptions of identity and against the background of Middle Eastern history. Even the concepts of history and identity require redefinition for the Westerner trying to understand the contemporary Middle East. In current American usage, the phrase "that's history" is commonly used to dismiss something as unimportant, of no relevance to current concerns, and, despite an immense investment in the teaching and writing of history, the general level of historical knowledge in our society is abysmally low. The Muslim peoples, like everyone else in the world, are shaped by their history, but, unlike some others, they are keenly aware of it. In the nineteen-eighties, during the Iran-Iraq war, for instance, both sides waged massive propaganda campaigns that frequently evoked events and personalities dating back as far as the seventh century. These were not detailed narratives but rapid, incomplete allusions, and yet both sides employed them in the secure knowledge that they would be understood by their target audiences—even by the large proportion of that audience that was illiterate. Middle Easterners' perception of history is nourished from the pulpit, by the schools, and by the media, and, although it may be—indeed, often is—slanted and inaccurate, it is nevertheless vivid and powerfully resonant.

But history of what? In the Western world, the basic unit of human organization is the nation, which is then subdivided in various ways, one of which is by religion. Muslims, however, tend to see not a nation subdivided into religious groups but a religion subdivided into nations. This is no doubt partly because most of the nation-states that make up the modern Middle East are relatively new creations, left over from the era of Anglo-French imperial domination that followed the defeat of the Ottoman Empire, and they preserve the state-building and frontier demarcations of their former imperial masters. Even their names reflect this artificiality: Iraq was a medieval province, with borders very different from those of the modern republic; Syria,



"I think he wants you to throw him the fence."

• •

Palestine, and Libya are names from classical antiquity that hadn't been used in the region for a thousand years or more before they were revived and imposed by European imperialists in the twentieth century; Algeria and Tunisia do not even exist as words in Arabic—the same name serves for the city and the country. Most remarkable of all, there is no word in the Arabic language for Arabia, and modern Saudi Arabia is spoken of instead as "the Saudi Arab kingdom" or "the peninsula of the Arabs," depending on the context. This is not because Arabic is a poor language—quite the reverse is true—but because the Arabs simply did not think in terms of combined ethnic and territorial identity. Indeed, the caliph Omar, the second in succession after the Prophet Muhammad, is quoted as saying to the Arabs, "Learn your genealogies, and do not be like the local peasants who, when they are asked who they are, reply: 'I am from such-and-such a place.' "

In the early centuries of the Muslim era, the Islamic community was one state under one ruler. Even after that community split up into many states, the ideal of a single Islamic polity persisted. The states were almost all dynastic, with shifting frontiers, and it is surely significant that, in the immensely rich historiography of the Islamic world in Arabic, Persian, and Turkish, there are histories of dynasties, of cities, and, primarily, of the Islamic state and community, but no histories of Arabia, Persia, or Turkey. Both Arabs and Turks produced a vast literature describing their struggles against Christian Europe, from the first Arab incursions in the eighth century to the final Turkish retreat in the twentieth. But until the modern period, when European concepts and categories became dominant, Islamic commentators almost always referred to their opponents not in territorial or ethnic terms but simply as infidels (*kafir*). They never referred to their own side as Arab or Turkish; they identified themselves as Muslims. This perspective helps to explain, among other things, Pakistan's concern for the Taliban in Afghanistan. The name Pakistan, a twentieth-century invention, designates a country defined entirely by its Islamic religion. In every other respect, the country and people of Pakistan are—as they have been for millennia—part of India. An Afghanistan defined by its Islamic identity would be a natural ally, even a satellite, of Pakistan. An Afghanistan defined by ethnic nationality, on the other hand, could be a dangerous neighbor, advancing irredentist claims on the Pashto-speaking areas of northwestern Pakistan and perhaps even allying itself with India.

II—THE HOUSE OF WAR

In the course of human history, many civilizations have risen and fallen—China, India, Greece, Rome, and, before them, the ancient civilizations of the Middle East. During the centuries that in European history are called medieval, the most advanced civilization in the world was undoubtedly that of Islam. Islam may have been equalled—or even, in some ways, surpassed—by India and China, but both of those civilizations remained essentially limited to one region and to one ethnic group, and their impact on the rest of the world was correspondingly restricted. The civilization of Islam, on the other hand, was ecumenical in its outlook, and explicitly so in its aspirations. One of the basic tasks bequeathed to Muslims by the Prophet was jihad. This word, which literally means "striving," was usually cited in the Koranic phrase "striving in the path of God" and was interpreted to mean armed struggle for the defense or advancement of Muslim power. In principle, the world was divided into two houses: the House of Islam, in which a Muslim government ruled and Muslim law prevailed, and the House of War, the rest of the world, still inhabited and, more important, ruled by infidels. Between the two, there was to be a perpetual state of war until the entire world either embraced Islam or submitted to the rule of the Muslim state.

From an early date, Muslims knew that there were certain differences among the peoples of the House of War. Most of them were simply polytheists and idolaters, who represented no serious threat to Islam and were likely prospects for conversion. The major exception was the Christians, whom Muslims recognized as having a religion of the same kind as their own, and therefore as their primary rival in the struggle for world domination—or, as they would have put it, world enlightenment. It is surely significant that the Koranic and other inscriptions on the Dome of the Rock, one of the earliest Muslim religious structures outside Arabia, built in Jerusalem between 691 and 692 A.D., include a number of directly anti-Christian polemics: "Praise be to God, who begets no son, and has no partner," and "He is God, one, eternal. He does not beget, nor is he begotten, and he has no peer." For the early Muslims, the leader of Christendom, the Christian equivalent of the Muslim caliph, was the Byzantine emperor in Constantinople. Later, his place was taken by the Holy Roman Emperor in Vienna, and his in turn by the new rulers of the West. Each of these, in his time, was the principal adversary of the jihad.

In practice, of course, the application of jihad wasn't always rigorous or violent. The canonically obligatory state of war could be interrupted by what were legally defined as "truces," but these differed little from the so-called peace treaties the warring European powers signed with one another. Such truces were made by the Prophet with his pagan enemies, and they became the basis of what one might call Islamic international law. In the lands under Muslim rule, Islamic law required that Jews and Christians be allowed to practice their religions and run their own affairs, subject to certain disabilities, the most important being a poll tax that they were required to pay. In modern parlance, Jews and Christians in the classical Islamic state were what we would call second-class citizens, but second-class citizenship, established by law and the Koran and recognized by public opinion, was far better than the total lack of citizenship that was the fate of non-Christians and even of some deviant Christians in the West. The jihad also did not prevent Muslim governments from occasionally seeking Christian allies against Muslim rivals—even during the Crusades, when Christians set up four principalities in the Syro-Palestinian area. The great twelfth-century Muslim leader Saladin, for instance, entered into an agreement with the Crusader king of Jerusalem, to keep the peace for their mutual convenience.

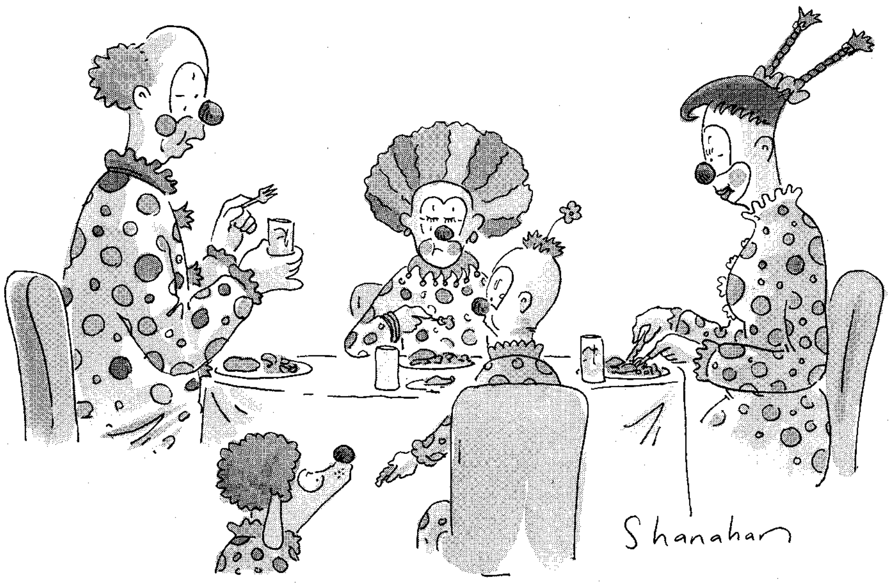
Under the medieval caliphate, and again under the Persian and Turkish dynasties, the empire of Islam was the richest, most powerful, most creative, most enlightened region in the world, and for most of the Middle Ages Christendom was on the defensive. In the fifteenth century, the Christian counterattack expanded. The Tatars were expelled from Russia, and the Moors from Spain. But in southeastern Europe, where the Ottoman sultan confronted first the Byzantine and then the Holy Roman Emperor, Muslim power prevailed, and these setbacks were seen as minor and peripheral. As late as the seventeenth century, Turkish pashas still ruled in Budapest and Belgrade, Turkish armies were besieging Vienna, and Barbary corsairs were raiding lands as distant as the British Isles and, on one occasion, in 1627, even Iceland.

Then came the great change. The second Turkish siege of Vienna, in 1683, ended in total failure followed by headlong retreat—an entirely new experience for the Ottoman armies. A contemporary Turkish historian, Silihdar Mehmet Aga, described the disaster with commendable frankness: "This was a calamitous defeat, so great that there has been none like it since the first appearance of the Ottoman state." This defeat, suffered by what was then the major military power of the Muslim world, gave rise to a new debate, which in a sense has been going on ever since. The argument began among the Ottoman military and political élite as a discussion of two questions: Why had the once victorious Ottoman armies been vanquished by the despised Christian enemy? And how could they restore the previous situation?

There was good reason for concern. Defeat followed defeat, and Christian European forces, having liberated their own lands, pursued their former invaders whence they had come, the Russians moving into North and Central Asia, the Portuguese into Africa and around Africa to South and Southeast Asia. Even small European powers such as Holland and Portugal were able to build vast empires in the East and to establish a dominant role in trade.

For most historians, Middle Eastern and Western alike, the conventional beginning of modern history in the Middle East dates from 1798, when the French Revolution, in the person of Napoleon Bonaparte, landed in Egypt. Within a remarkably short time, General Bonaparte and his small expeditionary force were able to conquer, occupy, and rule the country. There had been, before this, attacks, retreats, and losses of territory on the remote frontiers, where the Turks and the Persians faced Austria and Russia. But for a small Western force to invade one of the heartlands of Islam was a profound shock. The departure of the French was, in a sense, an even greater shock. They were forced to leave Egypt not by the Egyptians, nor by their suzerains the Turks, but by a small squadron of the British Royal Navy, commanded by a young admiral named Horatio Nelson. This was the second bitter lesson the Muslims had to learn: not only could a Western power arrive, invade, and rule at will but only another Western power could get it out.

By the early twentieth century—although a precarious independence was retained by Turkey and Iran and by some remoter countries like Afghanistan, which at that time did not seem worth the trouble of invading—almost the entire Muslim world had been incorporated into the four European empires of Britain, France, Russia, and the Netherlands. Middle Eastern governments and factions were forced to learn how to play these mighty rivals off against one an-



"A funny thing happened at work today."

other. For a time, they played the game with some success. Since the Western allies—Britain and France and then the United States—effectively dominated the region, Middle Eastern resisters naturally looked to those allies' enemies for support. In the Second World War, they turned to Germany; in the Cold War, to the Soviet Union.

And then came the collapse of the Soviet Union, which left the United States as the sole world superpower. The era of Middle Eastern history that had been inaugurated by Napoleon and Nelson was ended by Gorbachev and the elder George Bush. At first, it seemed that the era of imperial rivalry had ended with the withdrawal of both competitors: the Soviet Union couldn't play the imperial role, and the United States wouldn't. But most Middle Easterners didn't see it that way. For them, this was simply a new phase in the old imperial game, with America as the latest in a succession of Western imperial overlords, except that this overlord had no rival—no Hitler or Stalin—whom they could use either to damage or to influence the West. In the absence of such a patron, Middle Easterners found themselves obliged to mobilize their own force of resistance. Al Qaeda—its leaders, its sponsors, its financiers—is one such force.

III—"THE GREAT SATAN"

America's new role—and the Middle East's perception of it—was vividly illustrated by an incident in Pakistan in 1979. On November 20th, a band of a thousand Muslim religious radicals seized the Great Mosque in Mecca and held it for a time against the Saudi security forces. Their declared aim was to "purify Islam" and liberate the holy land of Arabia from the royal "clique of infidels" and the corrupt religious leaders who supported them. Their leader, in speeches played from loudspeakers, denounced Westerners as the destroyers of fundamental Islamic values and the Saudi government as their accomplices. He called for a return to the old Islamic traditions of "justice and equality." After some hard fighting, the rebels were suppressed. Their leader was executed on January 9, 1980, along with sixty-two of his followers, among them Egyptians, Kuwaitis, Yemenis, and citizens of other Arab countries.

Meanwhile, a demonstration in support of the rebels took place in the Pakistani capital, Islamabad. A rumor had circulated—endorsed by Ayatollah Khomeini, who was then in the process of establishing himself as the revolutionary leader in Iran—that American troops had been involved in the clashes in Mecca. The American Embassy was attacked by a crowd of Muslim demonstrators, and two Americans and two Pakistani employees were killed. Why had Khomeini stood by a report that was not only false but wildly improbable?

These events took place within the context of the Iranian revolution of 1979. On November 4th, the United States Embassy in Teheran had been seized, and fifty-two Americans were taken hostage; those hostages were then held for four hundred and forty-four days, until their release on January 20, 1981. The motives for this, baffling to many at the time, have become clearer since, thanks to subsequent statements and revelations from the hostage-takers and others. It is now apparent that the hostage crisis occurred not because relations between Iran and the United States were deteriorating but because they were improving. In the fall of 1979, the relatively moderate Iranian Prime Minister, Mehdi Bazargan, had arranged to meet with the American national-security adviser, Zbigniew Brzezinski, under the aegis of the Algerian government. The two men met on November 1st, and were reported to have been photographed shaking hands. There seemed to be a real possibility—in the eyes of the radicals, a real danger—that there might be some accommodation between the two countries. Protesters seized the Embassy and took the American diplomats hostage in order to destroy any hope of further dialogue.

For Khomeini, the United States was "the Great Satan," the principal adversary against whom he had to wage his holy war for Islam. America was by then perceived—rightly—as the leader of what we like to call "the free world." Then, as in the past, this world of unbelievers was seen as the only serious force rivalling and preventing the divinely ordained spread and triumph of Islam. But American observers, reluctant to recognize the historical quality of the hostility, sought other reasons for the anti-American sentiment that had been intensifying in the Islamic world for some time. One explanation, which was widely accepted, particularly in American foreign-policy circles, was that America's image had been tarnished by its wartime and continuing alliance with the former colonial powers of Europe.

In their country's defense, some American commentators pointed out that, unlike the Western European imperialists, America had itself been a victim of colonialism; the United States was the first country to win freedom from British rule. But the hope that the Middle Eastern subjects of the former British and French Empires would accept the American Revolution as a model for their own anti-imperialist struggle rested on a basic fallacy that Arab writers were quick to point out. The American Revolution was fought not by Native American nationalists but by British settlers, and, far from being a victory against colonialism, it represented colonialism's ultimate triumph—the English in North America succeeded in colonizing the land so thoroughly that they no longer needed the support of the mother country.

It is hardly surprising that former colonial subjects in the Middle East would see America as being tainted by the same kind of imperialism as Western Europe. But Middle Eastern resentment of imperial powers has not always been consistent. The Soviet Union, which extended the imperial conquests of the tsars of Russia, ruled with no light hand over tens of millions of Muslim subjects in Central Asian states and in the Caucasus; had it not been for American opposition and the Cold War, the Arab world might well have shared the fate of Poland and Hungary, or, more probably, that of Uzbekistan. And yet the Soviet Union suffered no similar backlash of anger and hatred from the Arab community. Even the Russian invasion of Afghanistan in 1979—a clear case of imperialist aggression, conquest, and domination—triggered only a muted response in the Islamic world. The P.L.O. observer at the United Nations defended the invasion, and the Organization of the Islamic Conference did little to protest it. South Yemen and Syria boycotted a meeting held to discuss the issue, Libya delivered an attack on the United States, and the P.L.O. representative abstained from voting and submitted his reservations in writing. Ironically, it was the United States, in the end, that was left to orchestrate an Islamic response to Soviet imperialism in Afghanistan.

As the Western European empires faded, Middle Eastern anti-Americanism was attributed more and more to another cause: American support for Israel, first in its conflict with the Palestinian Arabs, then in its conflict with the neighboring Arab states and the larger Islamic world. There is certainly support for this hypothesis in Arab statements on the subject. But there are incongruities, too. In the nineteen-thirties, Nazi Germany's policies were the main cause of Jewish migration to Palestine, then a British mandate, and the consequent reinforcement of the Jewish community there. The Nazis not only permitted this migration; they facilitated it until the outbreak of the war, while the British, in the somewhat forlorn hope of winning Arab good will, imposed and enforced restrictions. Nevertheless, the Palestinian leadership of the time, and many other Arab leaders, supported the Germans, who sent the Jews to Palestine, rather than the British, who tried to keep them out.

The same kind of discrepancy can be seen in the events leading to and following the establishment of the State of Israel, in 1948. The Soviet Union played a significant role in procuring the majority by which the General Assembly of the United Nations voted to establish a Jewish state in Palestine, and then gave Israel immediate de-jure recognition. The United States, however, gave only de-facto recognition. More important, the American government maintained a partial arms embargo on Israel, while Czechoslovakia, at Moscow's direction, immediately sent a supply of weaponry, which enabled the new state to survive the attempts to strangle it at birth. As late as the war of 1967, Israel still relied for its arms on European, mainly French, suppliers, not on the United States.

"Medicine is giving the eat-drink-and-be-merry model another look."

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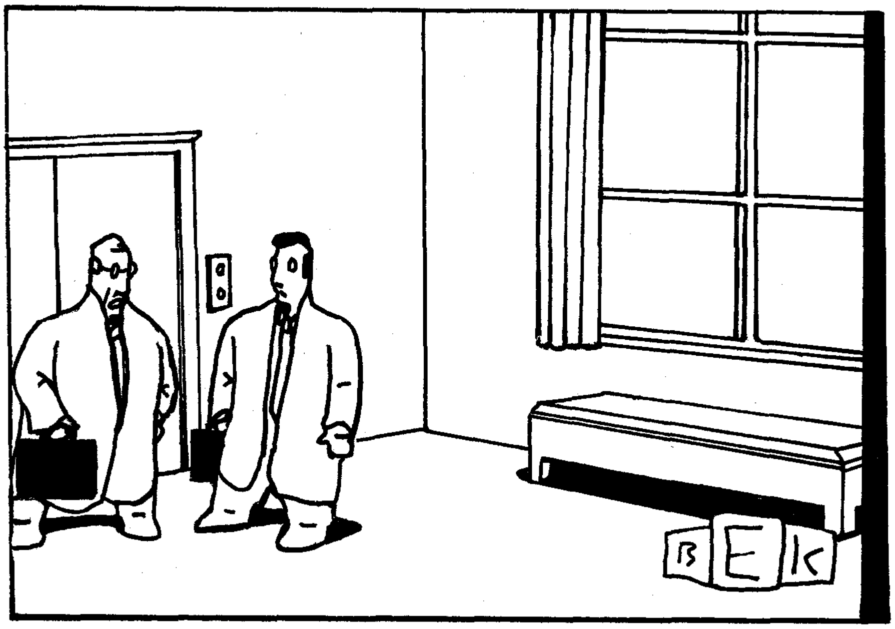
The Soviet Union had been one of Israel's biggest supporters. Yet, when Egypt announced an arms deal with Russia, in September of 1955, there was an overwhelmingly enthusiastic response in the Arab press. The Chambers of Deputies in Syria, Lebanon, and Jordan met immediately and voted resolutions of congratulation to President Nasser; even Nuri Said, the pro-Western ruler of Iraq, felt obliged to congratulate his Egyptian colleague—this despite the fact that the Arabs had no special love of Russia, nor did Muslims in the Arab world or elsewhere wish to invite either Communist ideology or Soviet power to their lands. What delighted them was that they saw the arms deal—no doubt correctly—as a slap in the face for the West. The slap, and the agitated Western response, reinforced the mood of hatred and spite toward the West and encouraged its exponents. It also encouraged the United States to look more favorably on Israel, now seen as a reliable and potentially useful ally in a largely hostile region. Today, it is often forgotten that the strategic relationship between the United States and Israel was a consequence, not a cause, of Soviet penetration.

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is only one of many struggles between the Islamic and non-Islamic worlds—on a list that includes Nigeria, Sudan, Bosnia, Kosovo, Macedonia, Chechnya, Sinkiang, Kashmir, and Mindanao—but it has attracted far more attention than any of the others. There are several reasons for this. First, since Israel is a democracy and an open society, it is much easier to



"I don't like all the responsibility that comes with my new pompousness."

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report—and misreport—what is going on. Second, Jews are involved, and this can usually secure the attention of those who, for one reason or another, are for or against them. Third, and most important, resentment of Israel is the only grievance that can be freely and safely expressed in those Muslim countries where the media are either wholly owned or strictly overseen by the government. Indeed, Israel serves as a useful stand-in for complaints about the economic privation and political repression under which most Muslim people live, and as a way of deflecting the resulting anger.

IV—DOUBLE STANDARDS

This raises another issue. Increasingly in recent decades, Middle Easterners have articulated a new grievance against American policy: not American complicity with imperialism or with Zionism but something nearer home and more immediate—American complicity with the corrupt tyrants who rule over them. For obvious reasons, this particular complaint does not often appear in public discourse. Middle Eastern governments, such as those of Iraq, Syria, and the Palestine Authority, have developed great skill in controlling their own media and manipulating those of Western countries. Nor, for equally obvious reasons, is it raised in diplomatic negotiation. But it is discussed, with increasing anguish and urgency, in private conversations with listeners who can be trusted, and recently even in public. (Interestingly, the Iranian revolution of 1979 was one time when this resentment was expressed openly. The Shah was accused of supporting America, but America was also attacked for imposing an impious and tyrannical leader as its puppet.)

Almost the entire Muslim world is affected by poverty and tyranny. Both of these problems are attributed, especially by those with an interest in diverting attention from themselves, to America—the first to American economic dominance and exploitation, now thinly disguised as "globalization"; the second to America's support for the many so-called Muslim tyrants who serve its purposes. Globalization has become a major theme in the Arab media, and it is almost always raised in connection with American economic penetration. The increasingly wretched economic situation in most of the Muslim world, relative not only to the West but also to the tiger economies of East Asia, fuels these frustrations. American paramountcy, as Middle Easterners see it, indicates where to direct the blame and the resulting hostility.

There is some justice in one charge that is frequently levelled against the United States: Middle Easterners increasingly complain that the United States judges them by different and lower standards than it does Europeans and Americans, both in what is expected of them and in what they may expect—in terms of their financial well-being and their political freedom. They assert that Western spokesmen repeatedly overlook or even defend actions and support rulers that they would not tolerate in their own countries. As many Middle Easterners see it, the Western and American governments' basic position is: "We don't care what you do to your own people at home, so long as you are coöperative in meeting our needs and protecting our interests."

The most dramatic example of this form of racial and cultural arrogance was what Iraqis and others see as the betrayal of 1991, when the United States called on the Iraqi people to revolt against Saddam Hussein. The rebels of northern and southern Iraq did so, and the United States forces watched while Saddam, using the helicopters that the ceasefire agreement had allowed him to retain, bloodily suppressed them, group by group. The reasoning behind this action—or, rather, inaction—is not difficult to see. Certainly, the victorious Gulf War coalition wanted a change of government in Iraq, but they had hoped for a coup d'état, not a revolution. They saw a genuine popular uprising as dangerous—it could lead to uncertainty or even anarchy in the region. A coup would be more predictable and could achieve the desired result—the replacement of Saddam Hussein by another, more amenable tyrant, who could take his place among America's so-called allies in the coalition. The United States' abandonment of Afghanistan after the departure of the Soviets was understood in much the same way as its abandonment of the Iraqi rebels.

Another example of this double standard occurred in the Syrian city of Hama and in refugee camps in Sabra and Shatila. The troubles in Hama began with an uprising headed by the radical group the Muslim Brothers in 1982. The government responded swiftly. Troops were sent, supported by armor, artillery, and aircraft, and within a very short time they had reduced a large part of the city to rubble. The number killed was estimated, by Amnesty International, at somewhere between ten thousand and twenty-five thousand. The action, which was ordered and supervised by the Syrian President, Hafiz al-Assad, attracted little attention at the time, and did not prevent the United States from subsequently courting Assad, who received a long succession of visits from American Secretaries of State James Baker, Warren Christopher, and Madeleine Albright, and even from President Clinton. It is hardly likely that Americans would have been so eager to propitiate a ruler who had perpetrated such crimes on Western soil, with Western victims.

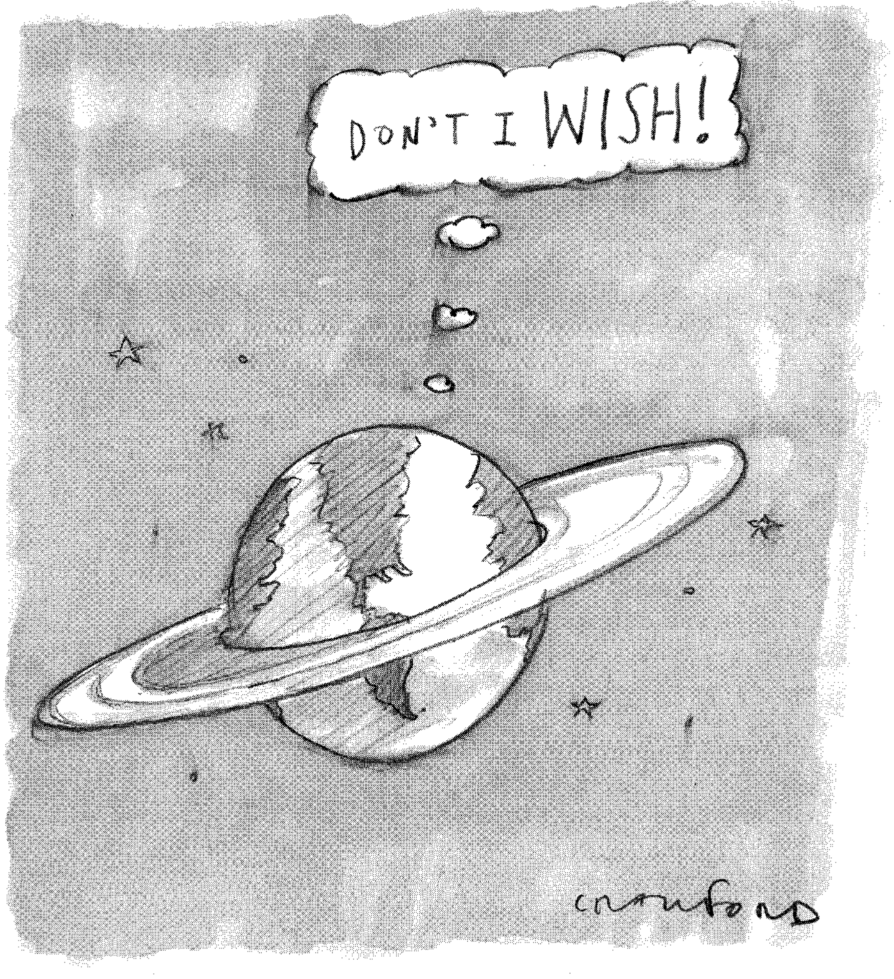
The massacre of seven hundred to eight hundred Palestinian refugees in Sabra and Shatila that same year was carried out by Lebanese militiamen, led by a Lebanese commander who subsequently became a minister in the Syrian-sponsored Lebanese government, and it was seen as a reprisal for the assassination of the Lebanese President Bashir Gemayyel. Ariel Sharon, who at the time commanded the Israeli forces in Lebanon, was reprimanded by an Israeli commission of inquiry for not having foreseen and prevented the massacre, and was forced to resign from his position as Minister of Defense. It is understandable that the Palestinians and other Arabs should lay sole blame for the massacre on Sharon. What is puzzling is that Europeans and Americans should do the same. Some even wanted to try Sharon for crimes against humanity before a tribunal in Europe. No such suggestion was made regarding either Saddam Hussein or Hafiz al-Assad, who slaughtered tens of thousands of their compatriots. It is easy to understand the bitterness of those who see the implication here. It was as if the militia who had carried out the deed were animals, not accountable by the same human standards as the Israelis.

Thanks to modern communications, the people of the Middle East are increasingly aware of the deep and widening gulf between the opportunities of the free world outside their borders and the appalling privation and repression within them. The resulting anger is naturally directed first against their rulers, and *then against those whom they see* as keeping those rulers in power for selfish reasons. It is surely significant that most of the terrorists who have been identified in the September 11th attacks on New York and Washington come from Saudi Arabia and Egypt—that is, from countries whose rulers are deemed friendly to the United States.

V—A FAILURE OF MODERNITY

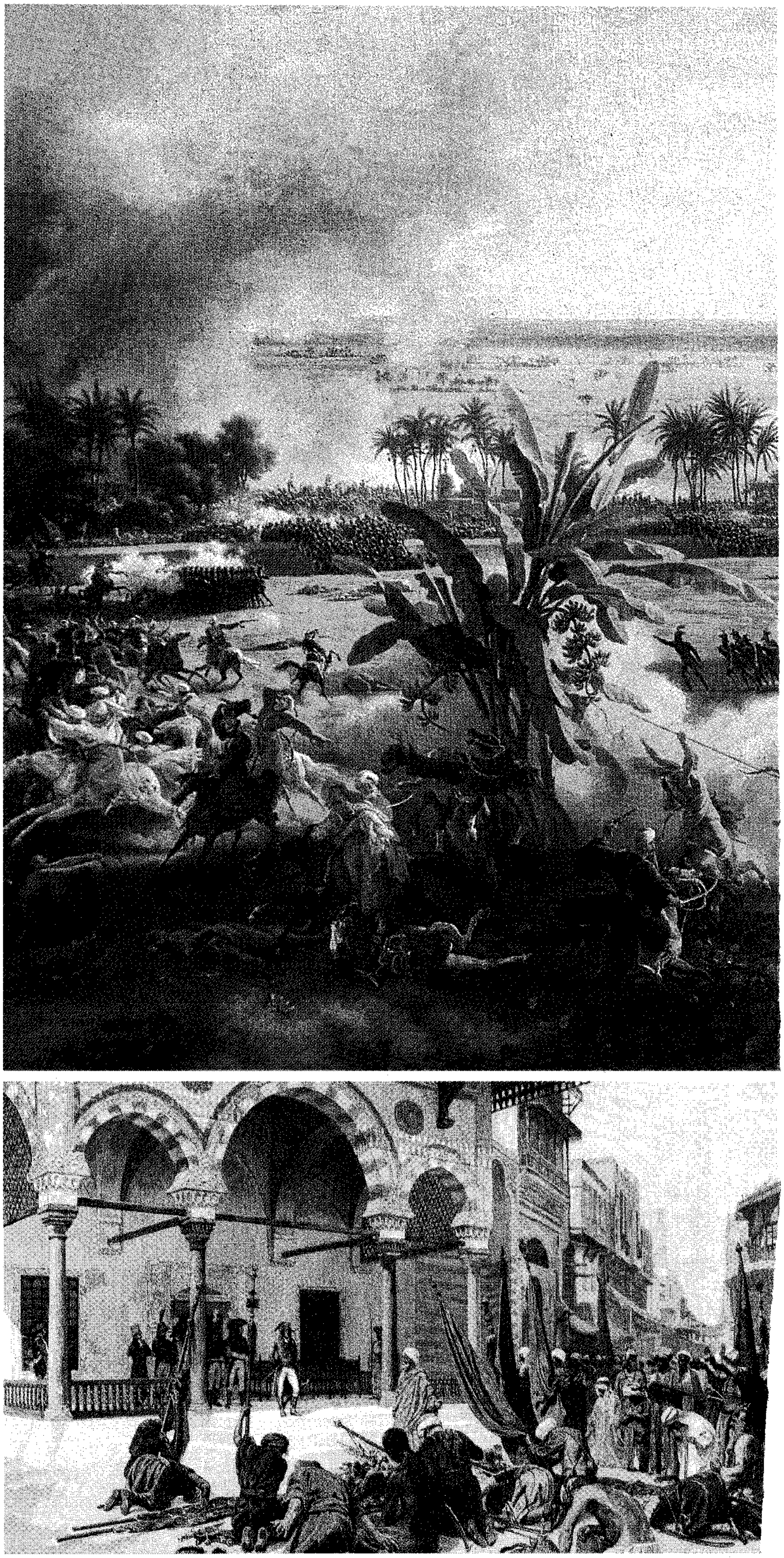
If America's double standards—and its selfish support for corrupt regimes in the Arab world—have long caused anger among Muslims, why has that anger only recently found its expression in acts of terrorism? In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Muslims responded in two ways to the widening imbalance of power and wealth between their societies and those of the West. The reformers or modernizers tried to identify the sources of Western wealth and power and adapt them to their own use, in order to meet the West on equal terms. Muslim governments—first in Turkey, then in Egypt and Iran—made great efforts to modernize, that is, to Westernize, the weaponry and equipment of their armed forces; they even dressed them in Western-style uniforms and marched them to the tune of brass bands. When defeats on the battlefield were matched by others in the marketplace, the reformers tried to discover the secrets of Western economic success and to emulate them by establishing industries of their own. Young Muslim students who were sent to the West to study the arts of war also came back with dangerous and explosive notions about elected assemblies and constitutional governments.

All attempts at reform ended badly. If anything, the modernization of the armed forces accelerated the process of defeat and withdrawal, culminating in the humiliating failure of five Arab states and armies to prevent a half million Jews from building a new state in the debris of the British Mandate in Palestine in 1948. With rare exceptions, the economic reforms, capitalist and socialist alike, fared no better. The Middle Eastern combination of low productivity and high birth rate makes for an unstable mix, and by all indications the Arab countries, in such matters as job



creation, education, technology, and productivity, lag ever farther behind the West. Even worse, the Arab nations also lag behind the more recent recruits to Western-style modernity, such as Korea, Taiwan, and Singapore. Out of a hundred and fifty-five countries ranked for economic freedom in 2001, the highest-ranking Muslim states are Bahrain (No. 9), the United Arab Emirates (No. 14), and Kuwait (No. 42). According to the World Bank, in 2000 the average annual income in the Muslim countries from Morocco to Bangladesh was only half the world average, and in the nineties the combined gross national products of Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon—that is, three of Israel's Arab neighbors—were considerably smaller than that of Israel alone. The per-capita figures are worse. According to United Nations statistics, Israel's per-capita G.D.P. was three and a half times that of Lebanon and Syria, twelve times that of Jordan, and thirteen and a half times that of Egypt. The contrast with the West, and now also with the Far East, is even more disconcerting.

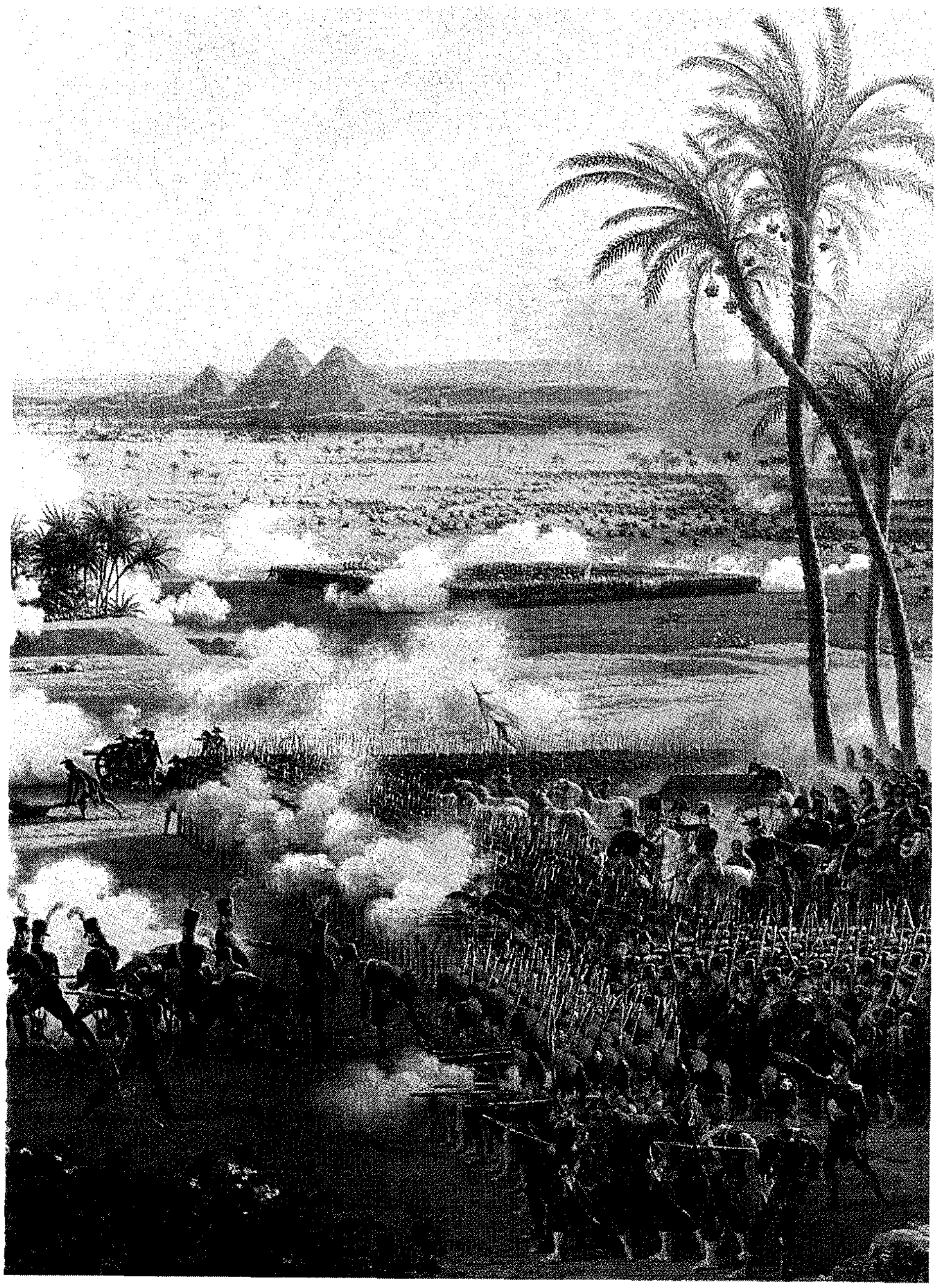
Modernization in politics has fared no better—perhaps even worse—than in warfare and economics. Many Islamic countries have experimented with democratic institutions of one kind or another. In some, as in Turkey, Iran, and Tunisia, they were introduced by innovative native reformers; in others, they were installed and then bequeathed by departing imperialists. The record, with the possible exception of Turkey, is one of almost unrelieved failure. Western-style parties and parliaments almost invariably ended in corrupt tyrannies, maintained by repression and indoctrination. The only European model that worked, in the sense of accomplishing its purposes, was the one-party dictatorship. The Baath Party, different branches of which have ruled Iraq and Syria for decades, incorporated the worst features of its Nazi and Soviet models. Since the death of Nasser, in 1970, no Arab leader has been able to gain extensive support outside his own country. Indeed, no Arab leader has been willing to submit his claim to power to a free vote. The leaders who have come closest to winning pan-Arab approval are Qaddafi in the seventies and, more recently, Saddam Hussein. That these two, of



The modern history of the Middle East began with Bonaparte's conquest of Egypt, in 17 all Arab rulers, should enjoy such wide popularity is in itself both appalling and revealing.

In view of this, it is hardly surprising that many Muslims speak of the failure of modernization. The rejection of modernity in favor of a return to the sacred past has a varied and ramified history in the region and has given rise to a number of movements. The most important of these, Wahhabism, has lasted more than two and a half centuries and exerts a significant influence on Muslim movements in the Middle East today. Its founder, Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab (1703-87), was a theologian from the Najd area of Arabia. In 1744, he launched a campaign of purification and renewal. His purpose was to return the Muslim world to the pure and authentic Islam of the Prophet, removing and, where necessary, destroying all later accretions. The Wahhabi cause was embraced by the Saudi rulers of Najd, who promoted it, for a while successfully, by force. In a series of campaigns, they carried their rule and their faith to much of central and eastern Arabia, before being rebuffed, at the end of the eighteenth century, by the Ottoman sultan, whom the Saudi ruler had denounced as a backslider from the true faith and a usurper in the Muslim state. The second alliance of Wahhabi doctrine and Saudi force began in the last years of the Ottoman Empire and continued after the collapse. The Saudi conquest of the Hejaz, including the holy cities of Mecca and Medina, increased the prestige of the House of Saud and gave new scope to the Wahhabi doctrine, which spread, in a variety of forms, throughout the Islamic world.

From the nineteen-thirties on, the discovery of oil in the eastern provinces of Arabia and its exploitation, chiefly by American companies, brought vast new wealth and bitter new social tensions. In the old society, inequalities of wealth had been limited, and their effects were restrained, on the one hand, by the traditional social bonds and obligations that linked rich and poor and, on the other hand, by the privacy of Muslim home life. Modernization has all too often widened the gap, destroyed those social bonds, and, through the universality of the modern media, made the resulting inequalities painfully visible. All this has



ove and left); British troops in Constantinople, in 1920 (right), after the Ottoman defeat.

CLOCKWISE: LOUIS FRANÇOIS LEJEUNE/BPK; UNDERWOOD; TIMEPIX

created new and receptive audiences for Wahhabi teachings and those of other like-minded groups, among them the Muslim Brothers in Egypt and Syria and the Taliban in Afghanistan.

It has now become normal to designate these movements as "fundamentalist." The term is unfortunate for a number of reasons. It was originally an American Protestant term, used to designate Protestant churches that differed in some respects from the mainstream churches. These differences bear no resemblance to those that divide Muslim fundamentalists from the Islamic mainstream, and the use of the term can therefore be misleading. Broadly speaking, Muslim fundamentalists are those who feel that the troubles of the Muslim world at the present time are the result not of insufficient modernization but of excessive modernization. From their point of view, the primary struggle is not against the Western enemy as such but against the Westernizing enemies at home, who have imported and imposed infidel ways on Muslim peoples. The task of the Muslims is to depose and remove these infidel rulers, sometimes by defeating or expelling their foreign patrons and protectors, and to abrogate and destroy the laws, institutions, and social customs that they have introduced, so as to return to a purely Islamic way of life, in accordance with the principles of Islam and the rules of the Holy Law.

FIRST THINGS TO HAND

In the skull kept on the desk.
In the spider pod in the dust.

Or nowhere. In milkmaids, in loaves,
Or nowhere. And if Socrates leaves

His house in the morning,
When he returns in the evening

He will find Socrates waiting
On the doorstep. Buddha the stick

You use to clear the path,
And Buddha the dog-doo you flick

Away with it, nowhere or in each
Several thing you touch:

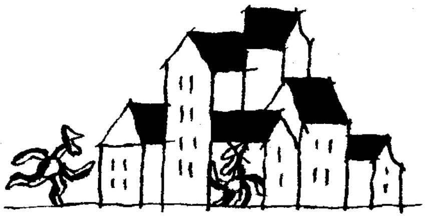
The dollar bill, the button
That works the television.

VI—THE RISE OF TERRORISM

Osama bin Laden and his Al Qaeda followers may not represent Islam, and their statements and their actions directly contradict basic Islamic principles and teachings, but they do arise from within Muslim civilization, just as Hitler and the Nazis arose from within Christian civilization, so they must be seen in their own cultural, religious, and historical context.

If one looks at the historical record, the Muslim approach to war does not differ greatly from that of Christians, or that of Jews in the very ancient and very modern periods when the option was open to them. While Muslims, perhaps more frequently than Christians, made war against the followers of other faiths to bring them within the scope of Islam, Christians—with the notable exception of the Crusades, which were themselves an imitation of Muslim practice—were more prone to fight internal religious wars against those whom they saw as schismatics or heretics. Islam, no doubt owing to the political and military involvement of its founder, takes what one might call a more pragmatic view than the Gospels of the realities of societal relationships. Because war for the faith has been a religious obligation within Islam from the beginning, it is elaborately regulated. Islamic religious law, or the Sharia, deals in some detail with such matters as the opening, conclusion, and resumption of hostilities, the avoidance of injury to noncombatants, the treatment of prisoners, the division of booty, and even the types of weapons that may be used. Some of these rules have been explained away by modern radical commentators who support the fundamentalists; others are simply disregarded.

What about terrorism? Followers of many faiths have at one time or another invoked religion in the practice of murder, both retail and wholesale. Two words deriving from such movements in Eastern religions have even entered the English language: "thug," from India, and "assassin," from the Middle East, both commemorating fanatical religious sects whose form of worship was to murder those whom they regarded as enemies of the faith. The question of the lawfulness of assassination in Islam first arose in 656 A.D., with the murder of the third caliph, Uthman, by pious Muslim rebels who believed they were carrying out the will of God. The first of a succession of civil wars was fought over the question of whether the rebels were fulfilling or defying God's commandment. Islamic law and tradition are very clear on the duty of obedience to the Islamic ruler. But they also quote two sayings attributed to the Prophet: "There is no obedience in sin" and "Do not obey a creature against his creator." If a ruler orders something that is contrary to the law of God, then the duty of obedience is replaced by a duty of disobedience. The notion of tyrannicide—the justified removal of a tyrant—was not an Islamic innovation; it was familiar in antiquity, among Jews, Greeks, and Romans alike, and those who performed it were often acclaimed as heroes.



Even in the joke, the three
Words American men say

After making love. *Where's*
The remote? In the tears

In things, proximate, intimate.
In the wired stem with root

And leaf nowhere of this lamp:
Brass base, aura of illumination,

Enlightenment, shade of grief.
Odor of the lamp, brazen.

The mind waiting in the mind
As in the first thing to hand.

—*Robert Pinsky*

Members of the eleventh-to-thirteenth-century Muslim sect known as the Assassins, which was based in Iran and Syria, seem to have been the first to transform the act that was named after them into a system and an ideology. Their efforts, contrary to popular belief, were primarily directed not against the Crusaders but against their own leaders, whom they saw as impious usurpers. In this sense, the Assassins are the true predecessors of many of the so-called Islamic terrorists of today, some of whom explicitly make this point. The name Assassins, with its connotation of "hashish-taker," was given to them by their Muslim enemies. They called themselves *fidayeen*—those who are ready to sacrifice their lives for their cause. The term has been revived and adopted by their modern imitators. In two respects, however—in their choice of weapons and of victims—the Assassins were markedly different from their modern successors. The victim was always an individual—a highly placed political, military, or religious leader who was seen as the source of evil. He, and he alone, was killed. This action was not terrorism in the current sense of that term but, rather, what we would call "targeted assassination." The method was always the same: the dagger. The Assassins disdained the use of poison, crossbows, and other weapons that could be used from a distance, and the Assassin did not expect—or, it would seem, even desire—to survive his act, which he believed would insure him eternal bliss. But in no circumstance did he commit suicide. He died at the hands of his captors.

The twentieth century brought a renewal of such actions in the Middle East, though of different types and for different purposes, and terrorism has gone through several phases. During the last years of the British Empire, imperial Britain faced terrorist movements in its Middle Eastern dependencies that represented three different cultures: Greeks in Cyprus, Jews in Palestine, and Arabs in Aden. All three acted from nationalist, rather than religious, motives. Though very different in their backgrounds and political circumstances, the three were substantially alike in their tactics. Their purpose was to persuade the imperial power that staying in the region was not worth the cost in blood. Their method was to attack the military and, to a lesser extent, administrative personnel and installations. All three operated only within their own territory and generally avoided collateral damage. All three succeeded in their endeavors.

Thanks to the rapid development of the media, and especially of television, the more recent forms of terrorism are targeted not at specific and limited enemy objectives but at world opinion. Their primary purpose is not to defeat or even to weaken the enemy militarily but to gain publicity—a psychological victory. The most successful group by far in this exercise has been the Palestine Liberation Organization. The P.L.O. was founded in 1964 but became important in 1967, after the defeat of the combined Arab armies in the Six-Day War. Regular warfare had failed; it was time to try other methods. The targets in this form of armed struggle were not military or other government establishments, which are usually too well guarded, but public places and gatherings of any kind, which are overwhelmingly civilian, and in which the victims do not necessarily have a connection to the declared enemy. Examples of this include, in 1970, the hijacking of three aircraft—one Swiss, one British, and one American—which were all taken to Amman; the 1972 murder of Israeli athletes at the Munich Olympics; the seizure in 1973 of the Saudi Embassy in Khartoum, and the murder there of two Americans and a Belgian diplomat; and the takeover of the Italian cruise ship Achille Lauro, in 1985. Other attacks were directed against schools, shopping malls, discothèques, pizzerias, and even passengers waiting in line at European airports. These and other attacks by the P.L.O. were immediately and remarkably successful in attaining their objectives—the capture of newspaper headlines and television screens. They also drew a great deal of support in sometimes unexpected places, and raised their perpetrators to starring roles in the drama of international relations. Small wonder that others were encouraged to follow their example—in Ireland, in Spain, and elsewhere.

The Arab terrorists of the seventies and eighties made it clear that they were waging a war for an Arab or Palestinian cause, not for Islam. Indeed, a significant proportion of the P.L.O. leaders and activists were Christian. Unlike socialism, which was discredited by its failure, nationalism was discredited by

"I want to write what I know, but all I know is writing workshops."

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its success. In every Arab land but Palestine, the nationalists achieved their purposes—the defeat and departure of imperialist rulers, and the establishment of national sovereignty under national leaders. For a while, freedom and independence were used as more or less synonymous and interchangeable terms. The early experience of independence, however, revealed that this was a sad error. Independence and freedom are very different, and all too often the attainment of one meant the end of the other.

Both in defeat and in victory, the Arab nationalists of the twentieth century pioneered the methods that were later adopted by religious terrorists, in particular the lack of concern at the slaughter of innocent bystanders. This unconcern reached new proportions in the terror campaign launched by Osama bin Laden in the early nineties. The first major example was the bombing of two American embassies in East Africa in 1998. In order to kill twelve American diplomats, the terrorists were willing to slaughter more than two hundred Africans, many of them Muslims, who happened to be in the vicinity. The same disregard for human life, on a vastly greater scale, underlay the action in New York on September 11th.

There is no doubt that the foundation of Al Qaeda and the consecutive declarations of war by Osama bin Laden marked the beginning of a new and ominous phase in the history of both Islam and terrorism. The triggers for bin Laden's actions, as he himself has explained very clearly, were America's presence in Arabia during the Gulf War—a desecration of the Muslim Holy Land—and America's use of Saudi Arabia as a base for an attack on Iraq. If Arabia is the most symbolic location in the world of Islam, Baghdad, the seat of the caliphate for half a millennium and the scene of some of the most glorious chapters in Islamic history, is the second.

There was another, perhaps more important, factor driving bin Laden. In the past, Muslims fighting against the West could always turn to the enemies of the West for comfort, encouragement, and material and military help. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, for the first time in centuries there was no such useful enemy. There were some nations that had the will, but they lacked the means to play the role of the Third Reich or the Soviet Union. Bin Laden and his cohorts soon realized that, in the new configuration of world power, if they wished to fight America they had to do it themselves. Some eleven years ago, they created Al Qaeda, which included many veterans of the war in Afghanistan. Their task might have seemed daunting to anyone else, but they did not see it that way. In their view, they had already driven the Russians out of Afghanistan, in a defeat so overwhelming that it led directly to the collapse of the Soviet Union itself. Having overcome the superpower that they had always regarded as more formidable, they felt ready to take on the other; in this they were encouraged by the opinion, often expressed by Osama bin Laden, among others, that America was a paper tiger.

Muslim terrorists had been driven by such beliefs before. One of the most surprising revelations in the memoirs of those who held the American Embassy in Teheran from 1979 to 1981 was that their original intention had been to hold the building and the hostages for only a few days. They changed their minds when statements from Washington made it clear that there was no danger of serious action against them. They finally released the hostages, they explained, only because they feared that the new President, Ronald Reagan, might approach the problem "like a cowboy."

Bin Laden and his followers clearly have no such concern, and their hatred is neither constrained by fear nor diluted by respect. As precedents, they repeatedly cite the American retreats from Vietnam, from Lebanon, and—the most important of all, in their eyes—from Somalia. Bin Laden's remarks in an interview with John Miller, of ABC News, on May 28, 1998, are especially revealing:

> We have seen in the last decade the decline of the American government and the weakness of the American soldier, who is ready to wage cold wars and unprepared to fight long wars. This was proven in Beirut when

> the Marines fled after two explosions. It also proves they can run in less than twenty-four hours, and this was also repeated in Somalia. . . . The youth were surprised at the low morale of the American soldiers. . . . After a few blows, they ran in defeat. . . . They forgot about being the world leader and the leader of the new world order. [They] left, dragging their corpses and their shameful defeat, and stopped using such titles.

Similar inferences are drawn when American spokesmen refuse to implicate—and sometimes even hasten to exculpate—parties that most Middle Easterners believe to be deeply involved in the attacks on America. A good example is the repeated official denial of any Iraqi involvement in the events of September 11th. It may indeed be true that there is no evidence of Iraqi involvement, and that the Administration is unwilling to make false accusations. But it is difficult for Middle Easterners to resist the idea that this refusal to implicate Saddam Hussein is due less to a concern for legality than to a fear of confronting him. He would indeed be a formidable adversary. If he faces the prospect of imminent destruction, as would be inevitable in a real confrontation, there is no knowing what he might do with his already considerable arsenal of unconventional weapons. Certainly, he would not be restrained by any scruples, or by the consideration that the greatest victims of any such attack would be his own people and their immediate neighbors.

For Osama bin Laden, 2001 marks the resumption of the war for the religious dominance of the world that began in the seventh century. For him and his followers, this is a moment of opportunity. Today, America exemplifies the civilization and embodies the leadership of the House of War, and, like Rome and Byzantium, it has become degenerate and demoralized, ready to be overthrown. Khomeini's designation of the United States as "the Great Satan" was telling. In the Koran, Satan is described as "the insidious tempter who whispers in the hearts of men." This is the essential point about Satan: he is neither a conqueror nor an exploiter—he is, first and last, a tempter. And for the members of Al Qaeda it is the seduction of America that represents the greatest threat to the kind of Islam they wish to impose on their fellow-Muslims.

But there are others for whom America offers a different kind of temptation—the promise of human rights, of free institutions, and of a responsible and elected government. There are a growing number of individuals and even some movements that have undertaken the complex task of introducing such institutions in their own countries. It is not easy. Similar attempts, as noted, led to many of today's corrupt regimes. Of the fifty-seven member states of the Organization of the Islamic Conference, only one, the Turkish Republic, has operated democratic institutions over a long period of time and, despite difficult and ongoing problems, has made progress in establishing a liberal economy and a free society and political order.

In two countries, Iraq and Iran, where the regimes are strongly anti-American, there are democratic oppositions capable of taking over and forming governments. We could do much to help them, and have done little. In most other countries in the region, there are people who share our values, sympathize with us, and would like to share our way of life. They understand freedom, and want to enjoy it at home. It is more difficult for us to help those people, but at least we should not hinder them. If they succeed, we shall have friends and allies in the true, not just the diplomatic, sense of these words.

Meanwhile, there is a more urgent problem. If bin Laden can persuade the world of Islam to accept his views and his leadership, then a long and bitter struggle lies ahead, and not only for America. Sooner or later, Al Qaeda and related groups will clash with the other neighbors of Islam—Russia, China, India—who may prove less squeamish than the Americans in using their power against Muslims and their sanctities. If bin Laden is correct in his calculations and succeeds in his war, then a dark future awaits the world, especially the part of it that embraces Islam. ♦

"You seem familiar yet somehow strange—
are you by any chance Canadian?"

A REPORTER AT LARGE

THE TOWER BUILDER

Why did the World Trade Center buildings fall down when they did?

BY JOHN SEABROOK

Structural engineers make buildings stand up, but the public doesn't pay much attention to what they do until a building falls down. Although the safety of a building's occupants depends on its structure, most people notice only the aesthetics, the furnishings, and the view, and give the architects, not the engineers, all the credit (or blame) for the results. Very few inhabitants of modern high-rises know where the load-bearing columns are placed, and how they are supported, or whether the building is a frame structure or a tube structure, and almost no one checks above the ceiling tiles to see how the floor overhead is attached to the vertical supports—all decisions that are worked out by the building's structural engineers. The anonymity of the high-rise structural engineer is the reward for his genius. Part of the awe that skyscrapers command lies in their apparent freedom from gravity: they're not just tall; they're effortlessly tall.

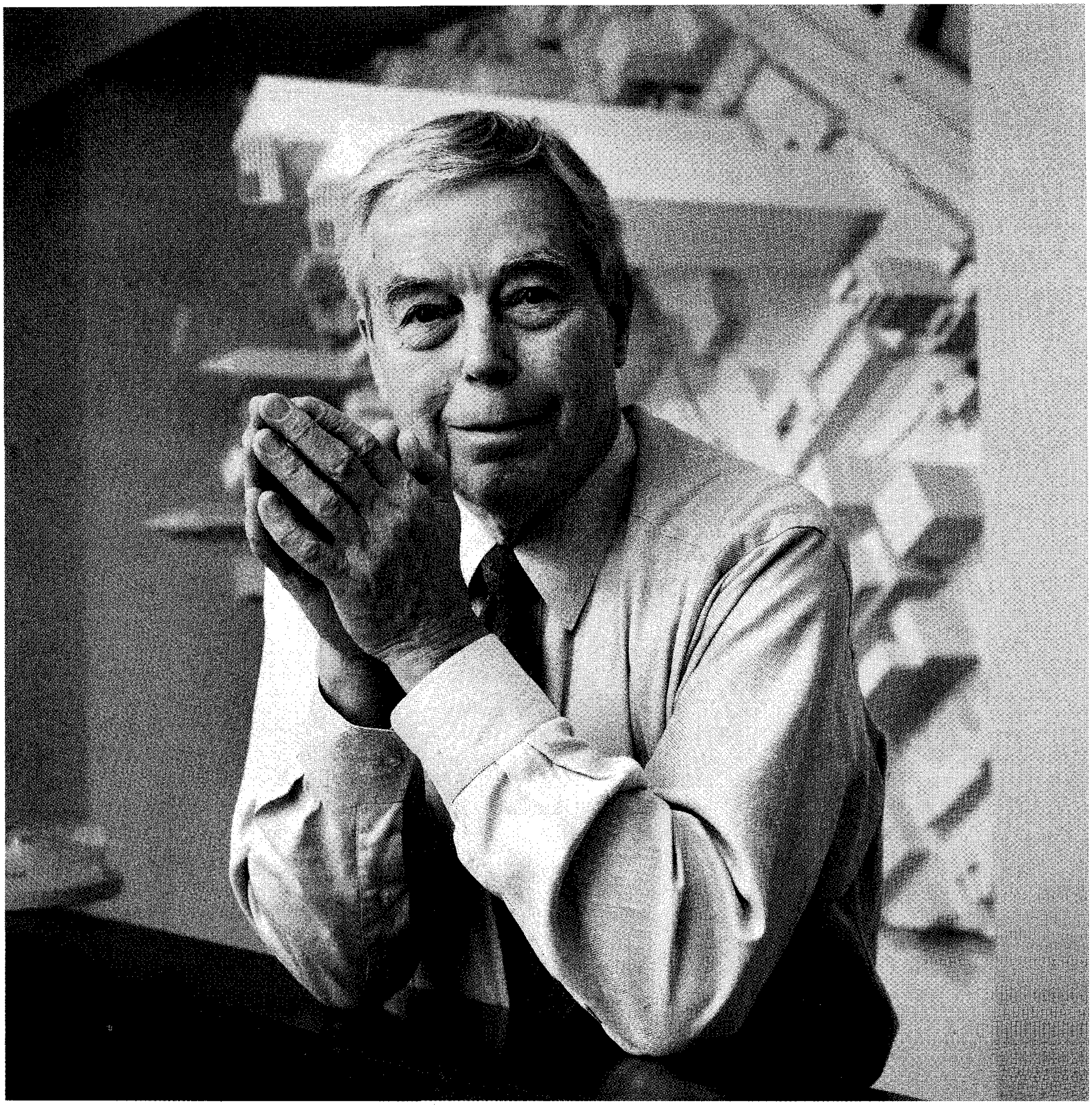
Since the collapse of the World Trade Center towers, on September 11th, structural engineers and their profession have received a great deal of public attention. University engineering departments around the country have been staging public forums in which the "mechanics of failure" are debated; there's one at Columbia University this week. The American Society of Civil Engineers and FEMA (the Federal Emergency Management Agency) are funding a team of twenty-four civil and fire-safety engineers to investigate what parts of the Twin Towers' structure failed first, and how much damage was caused by the impact and blast of the airplanes, and how much by the ensuing fires. Dr. W. Gene Corley, a structural engineer with Construction Technology Laboratories, in Skokie, Illinois, who led FEMA's investigation into the collapse of the nine-story Murrah Building, in Oklahoma City in 1995, is the over-all director of FEMA's inquiry into the World Trade towers. In addition to inspecting the site of the disaster, he told me, his team will review photographs and enhanced videos of the collapse, examine the debris, and use information from firemen, policemen, survivors, and other witnesses in an attempt to reconstruct the moment at which each structure failed.

Of course, you don't need an engineer to tell you why the towers fell down: two Boeing 767s, travelling at hundreds of miles an hour, and carrying more than ten thousand gallons of jet fuel each (if you converted the energy in the Oklahoma City bomb into jet fuel, it would amount to only fifty-one gallons), crashed into the north and south buildings at 8:45 A.M. and 9:06 A.M., respectively, causing them to fall—the south tower at 9:59 A.M. and the north tower at ten-twenty-eight. Nor do we need a government panel to tell us that the best way to protect tall buildings is to keep airplanes out of them. Nevertheless, there is considerable debate among experts about precisely what order of events precipitated the collapse of each building, and whether the order was the same in both towers. Did the connections between the floors and the columns give way first or did the vertical supports that remained after the impact lose strength in the fire, and, if so, did the exterior columns or the core columns give way first? "That's the sixty-four-thousand-dollar question," said Ron Hamburger, a structural engineer with ABS Consulting, in Oakland, California, who is also on FEMA's team, when I asked which of these scenarios he favored. Although there may never be another event like the attack on the towers, the disaster also highlights several potential weaknesses in the way that many modern high-rises are constructed—weaknesses that the designers of the tall buildings of the future may want to consider.

Leslie E. Robertson is the engineer who, with his then partner, John Skilling, was mainly responsible for the structure of the Twin Towers. Unlike most of his colleagues, who have been widely quoted and interviewed, he has remained largely out of the public eye since September 11th. His only public appearance was at a previously scheduled meeting of the National Council of Structural Engineers Associations, on October 5th, in New Hampshire, where, as the *Wall Street Journal* reported, on being asked by an engineer in the audience, "Is there anything you wish you had done differently in the design of the building?," Robertson broke down and wept at the lectern. Guy Nordenson, a structural engineer in New York and a professor at Princeton, who, like many of his colleagues, regards Robertson with great respect, showed me a recent E-mail he had received from him. It was a response to a letter Nordenson had written to the *Times*, praising the towers' structural design for keeping them standing as long as they did, and allowing some twenty-five thousand people to escape. "It's very Les," he said, referring to Robertson, and pointed at his computer screen. "Almost Shakespearean." Robertson had written:

> Your words do much to abate the fire that writhes inside
> It is hard
> But that I had done a bit more . . .
> Had the towers stood up for just one minute longer . . .
> It is hard.

On a brilliantly sunny fall morning in late October, I visited Robertson's offices, on the top two floors of 30 Broad Street, a forty-eight-story building that stands a few blocks from Ground Zero. From the windows of the conference room where I waited for Robertson, there was a clear view down into the rubble where the south tower once stood. Fires were still burning inside the pit, and the smell, that sweet acrid odor of burning metal and decay, was noticeable in the room. Many of the firm's sixty employees, including Saw-Teen See, Robertson's



"I have a lot of tough nights," Leslie E. Robertson, who helped design the World Trade Center, said. Photograph by Alen MacWeeney.

wife, who is also a partner in the firm, stood by these windows and watched as the second plane flew in over Hudson River Park, banked, and disappeared inside the south tower. See remembers closing her eyes at that moment, and didn't see the fireball come out the other side.

I turned away from the view and studied pictures of other buildings that Robertson's firm had worked on over the years, which were displayed around the room, including the Bank of China Tower, in Hong Kong, a twelve-hundred-and-nine-foot structure engineered by Robertson for I. M. Pei. Pei's characteristic triangular shapes had been seamlessly translated into gigantic diagonal braces on the sides of the building. Structural engineers commonly complain that architects don't understand how to construct high-rise buildings, from either a structural or an economic perspective, leaving it to the engineers to wrestle with the problems posed by the architecture and to resolve them in a way that allows the potential contractor to submit a bid for the project that is within the developer's budget. Such a perfect marriage of architecture and structure as the Bank of China Tower is unusual in the creation of skyscrapers, but it is a distinguishing feature of many of the buildings that Robertson has worked on over the years, and especially the World Trade towers.

On entering the room, Robertson walked over and looked out the window at the smoking pile where his structures had once been. He seemed to do this casually, but as we stood there I noticed that he was trembling slightly. He remained before the window for almost a minute, with the air of a man forcing himself to confront something he didn't want to confront, nodding as though to say, O.K., this is reality, I know it—but

"They say we can go there for Thanksgiving or they can cut us out of the will. Our choice."

• •

looking bewildered at the same time. When we sat down, he said, "The World Trade Center was a team effort, but the collapse of the World Trade Center is my responsibility, and that's the way I feel about it."

Robertson, who is seventy-three, wore a gray silk shirt that was open at the collar. His hair is mostly white, and longish, falling over his ears, and with bangs in front, which gives him a slightly bohemian look. His brown eyes are like very deep pools, and the flesh below the eyes was swollen, either with fatigue or with grief. As we talked, he frequently looked out the window. I felt the absence of the buildings in him. "That's how people introduced me," he said. "I was the designer of the World Trade Center. Although that was wrong, actually—I only assisted on the team that designed it. But that's who I was."

Robertson was in Hong Kong on September 11th, having dinner with the developers of a skyscraper that will be built in Kowloon. "A woman's cell phone rang, and she said an airplane had hit the World Trade towers. I thought it was an accident, one of the helicopters that were always flying overhead. A short time later, my wife called me and said the second plane had hit, and I went upstairs and turned on the television. I knew both buildings were hit by planes, both on fire. I had no idea whether there were a thousand people or fifty thousand people at risk. I knew the fire was burning out of control, I knew people were jumping to get away from the heat . . ." His eyes searched the empty view again.

"Before the buildings collapsed," I asked, "did any part of your brain, calculating, say, 'There's probably this amount of jet fuel, this amount of fire protection—the building has this long to last'?"

"I can't . . . I think there are times when logic just isn't the right way to think." Robertson's eyes were filling with tears. "This all took place in an hour and a half. The TV was on. I don't know if what I saw was the buildings falling down on rerun or whether it was live. I was just focussed on getting back to New York City. I remember packing my bags. And when the building collapsed—it was totally devastating."

During the last hundred and twenty years, three major types of structures have been employed in tall buildings in New York City. The first type was used in the cast-iron buildings of the eighteen-eighties and nineties, in which the "gravity load"—the weight of the building—was carried mostly by the exterior walls. This type of structure creates factory and warehouse spaces (and, now, residential lofts) that are relatively free of internal supporting columns—more usable real estate for the tenants—but, when combined with wooden floor beams and more lenient building codes, it also makes the buildings vulnerable to collapse. In a fire, the floors tend to collapse, and the iron frame loses strength and implodes.

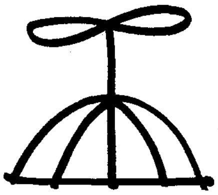
The second generation of tall buildings, which includes the Metropolitan Life Building (1909), the Woolworth Building (1913), and the Empire State Building (1931), are frame structures, in which a skeleton of welded- or riveted-steel columns and beams, often encased in concrete, runs through the entire building. This type of construction makes for an extremely strong structure, but not such attractive floor space. The interiors are full of heavy, load-bearing columns and walls, and, as you move toward the center of these buildings, the more crypt-like they feel. Charlie Thornton, of the Manhattan-based structural-engineering firm of Thornton-Tomasetti Engineers, a leading designer of the structures of modern high-rises, said to me recently, "A building like the Empire State Building is way overdesigned and overbuilt. The building didn't need all that support. Those engineers didn't understand loads the way we understand them—they used slide rules to work them out, whereas we have computers—and so they erred on the side of caution."

Most high-rises erected since the nineteen-sixties use a third type of structure—a synthesis of the best aspects of the two previous kinds of structure. The perimeter structures of these buildings resemble tubes. Inside, a massive hollow core made of steel and/or concrete contains many of the services: elevators, stairwells, and bathrooms. Because the core and perimeter columns carry so much of the load, the designers could eliminate interior columns, with the result that there is more open floor space for the tenants. And, because frame structures require ironworkers to weld or rivet the beams to the supporting columns on site, which is both expensive and dangerous, reducing the extent of the frame means that more of the structure can be fabricated off site, making the building safer and more cost-effective to erect. Finally, improvements in metallurgy increased the strength of the structural steel in these buildings, allowing engineers to reduce, or eliminate, the use of concrete in supporting the structure. Reinforced concrete, although it is more fire-resistant than steel, is messy and expensive to work with, especially in Manhattan, where traffic and space constraints at sites make it difficult to bring in the daily fleets of cement mixers necessary for a big job.

The floors in most of the high-rise buildings erected since the sixties are much lighter in weight than the floors in the older buildings. In a typical high-rise office floor, three or four inches of concrete covers a corrugated-steel deck, whose weight is supported by I-beams or, in the case of the Twin Towers, by long "trusses"—lightweight strips of steel that are braced by crosshatched webs of square or cylindrical bars, creating a hollow space below each floor surface. This space allows builders to install heating and cooling ducts within the floors, rather than in a drop ceiling below them—an innovation that means the developer can increase the number of floors in the entire building.

All of these improvements led to a high-rise building boom in New York City during the sixties and seventies; the World Trade towers, conceived in 1963 and opened in the early seventies, were the most famous products of that era. But, as the new high-rises sprouted, some New York City firefighters began to point out that the same innovations that make these buildings more economical to erect and more pleasant to inhabit also make them more vulnerable to fire. In 1976, the New York City Fire Commissioner, John O'Hagan, published a book entitled "High Rise/Fire and Life Safety," in which he called attention to the serious fire-safety issues in most high-rise buildings constructed since 1970, referring to such buildings as "semi-combustible." Unlike the earlier generation of skyscrapers, which used concrete and masonry to protect the structural steel, many of the newer buildings employed sheetrock and spray-on fire protection. The spray-on protection generally consisted of either a cementlike material that resembles plaster or a mineral-fibre spray, such as the one used to protect the floor joists in the World Trade Center. O'Hagan pointed out that, even when these spray-ons are properly mixed and applied to the steel (which must be clean), they are much less dense than concrete and can be easily knocked off. The swaying of the cables in the elevator shafts has been known to dislodge the fire protection from the columns in the cores of these buildings, and the coating used on floor supports is often removed by workers who install the ducts and wiring inside the hollow floor. The questionable performance of the fire protection used in these buildings, combined with the greater expanse of lightweight, unsupported floors, O'Hagan said, created the potential for collapse, of the individual floors and of the entire structure. He also pointed out that the open spaces favored by modern developers allowed fires to spread faster than the compartmentalized spaces of the earlier buildings, and that the synthetic furnishings in modern buildings created more heat and smoke than materials made out of wood and natural fibres.

O'Hagan's book did nothing to stop semi-combustible buildings from going up—a fireman's predictable lament about safety was not what a city in love with its skyscrapers wanted to hear. It was not until September 11th that the architects and builders of tall buildings began to think seriously about whether the modern methods of constructing high-rises needed to be revised. One indication that older high-rise buildings may be more fire-resistant than the newer high-rise buildings is the performance of the twenty-three-story building at 90 West Street—a Cass Gilbert-designed building, finished in 1907 (Gilbert also designed the Woolworth Building), whose structure was protected by concrete and masonry—compared with the performance of 7 World Trade, an all-steel building, from the nineteen-eighties, that had spray-on fire protection. Both buildings were completely gutted by fires on September 11th, but 90 West Street is still standing, and may eventually be restored. 7 World Trade, which had a gas main beneath it, collapsed after burning for seven hours.



Leslie Robertson was born in California in 1928. A poor student, he dropped out of high school at the age of sixteen and spent two years in the Navy, where he became an electronics technician. There, he says, "I learned that I actually knew how to do things, and if I wanted to I could get them done." His father had been an inventor, "a brilliant guy, but he never stuck at anything." After leaving the military, Robertson attended the University of California at Berkeley, where he received a bachelor's degree in science. He began his career by designing electrical systems for factories, and from there he moved into structural engineering. He worked for several engineering firms around the country, including Raymond International, where he assisted in the engineering of offshore-drilling rigs, until he decided to go back to California. Driving from New York to San Francisco in late 1958, he ran out of money in Seattle and took the first job he could get—working at a firm of structural engineers then called Worthington-Skilling.

In 1963, the firm entered a competition held by the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey to build in New York City what would be the tallest buildings ever constructed—the two towers of the World Trade Center. It was one of eight engineering firms—most of them large partnerships in New York—asked to submit proposals. Although the firm's tallest building up to that point was the twenty-story I.B.M. Building in Seattle, the architect of that building was Minoru Yamasaki—the same architect the Port Authority had selected for the World Trade Center. At a meeting to present the firm's proposal to the architect and developers, John Skilling, one of the four partners, used only a drawing pad, an easel, and some markers to make his pitch.

The man the Port Authority had chosen as the architect of the tallest buildings in the world was afraid of heights. The glass curtain-wall skyscrapers, in which the only separation between you and the outside is a thinnish piece of glass, frightened Yamasaki. He thought tall buildings should have structural elements around the perimeter, so that the occupants would feel secure in them. In engineering the I.B.M. Building for Yamasaki, Skilling's firm had come up with a structure in which the exterior walls were made of closely spaced steel pipes. Yamasaki liked the soothing effect that the pipes had on his acrophobia, and the building's vertical aspect—it appears to be dressed in a pin-striped suit—appealed to his aesthetic. Yamasaki had something similar in mind for the World Trade Center, but on a much larger scale: solid elements at the edges, which he could brace himself on before looking out. "And Yama was not a large man," Saw-Teen See told me, "so the columns couldn't be too far apart."

What Skilling proposed was a pure tube structure. His design was consistent with the general principles at work in the new generation of high-rises, but he carried the concept of the tube building farther than it had ever been taken before. (Or since: the Sears Tower, in Chicago, which replaced the World Trade towers as the world's tallest building in 1973, is also a tube building, but it is actually a cluster of nine smaller tubes.) The Twin Towers would be perforated steel boxes surrounding a hollow steel core. The outer box would be two hundred and eight feet on each side, and made of fourteen-inch-wide steel columns that were spaced on forty-inch centers—much closer than the fifteen-to-thirty-foot spaces that separate most supporting columns in a building. Like the cast-iron buildings of the previous century, the exterior walls would be load-bearing; unlike most skyscrapers, which hide their supporting columns, the Twin Towers would proudly wear their structure on their sleeves. Because there were so many load-bearing columns around the perimeter of each building, the engineers could completely eliminate all columns within the office space. Joining the outside tube to the inner core were state-of-the-art lightweight floor trusses that spanned sixty feet from core to exterior walls on two sides, and thirty-five feet on the other two sides. Yamasaki liked the design because it reminded him of a bamboo tube, an important totem for him. The Port Authority liked the design because, among other things, the towers would offer the single largest expanse of column-free office space in Manhattan—a realtor's dream.

Skilling's firm got the commission, and Robertson, then thirty-five, moved to New York to open a new office, and to supervise the structural aspects of the building's construction. In 1983, the Seattle office and the New York office split, becoming two separate firms. Skilling (who died in 1998) and Robertson later argued about who was more responsible for the structure of the towers. "These are guys with big egos, and things got a little testy between them regarding who was ultimately responsible for the design," says Jon Magnusson, the chairman and C.E.O. of the Seattle-based firm, which is now called Skilling Ward Magnusson Barkshire. "Skilling said, 'It was me,' Robertson said, 'It was me,' but I think the truth is that both of them made a significant contribution."

The trick to designing tall buildings in windy places (like New York City and Chicago) is to endow them with enough elasticity to move with the wind but enough stiffness so that the people working on the upper floors don't know the building is moving. The World Trade towers used the perimeter walls, rather than the core, to brace the buildings against the wind, a concept that recalled the first generation of high-rises. As Robertson described the models and experiments he had devised to test how the towers would stand up to external forces that might topple them, he looked almost happy for the first time that morning. He built models of the towers and placed them in a wind tunnel; he put people in motion simulators and observed their behavior; he invented a new kind of damper system to lessen the effect of the wind throughout the buildings. He rode on top of elevator cars in other skyscrapers to see whether the cables banged against the cores of the buildings.

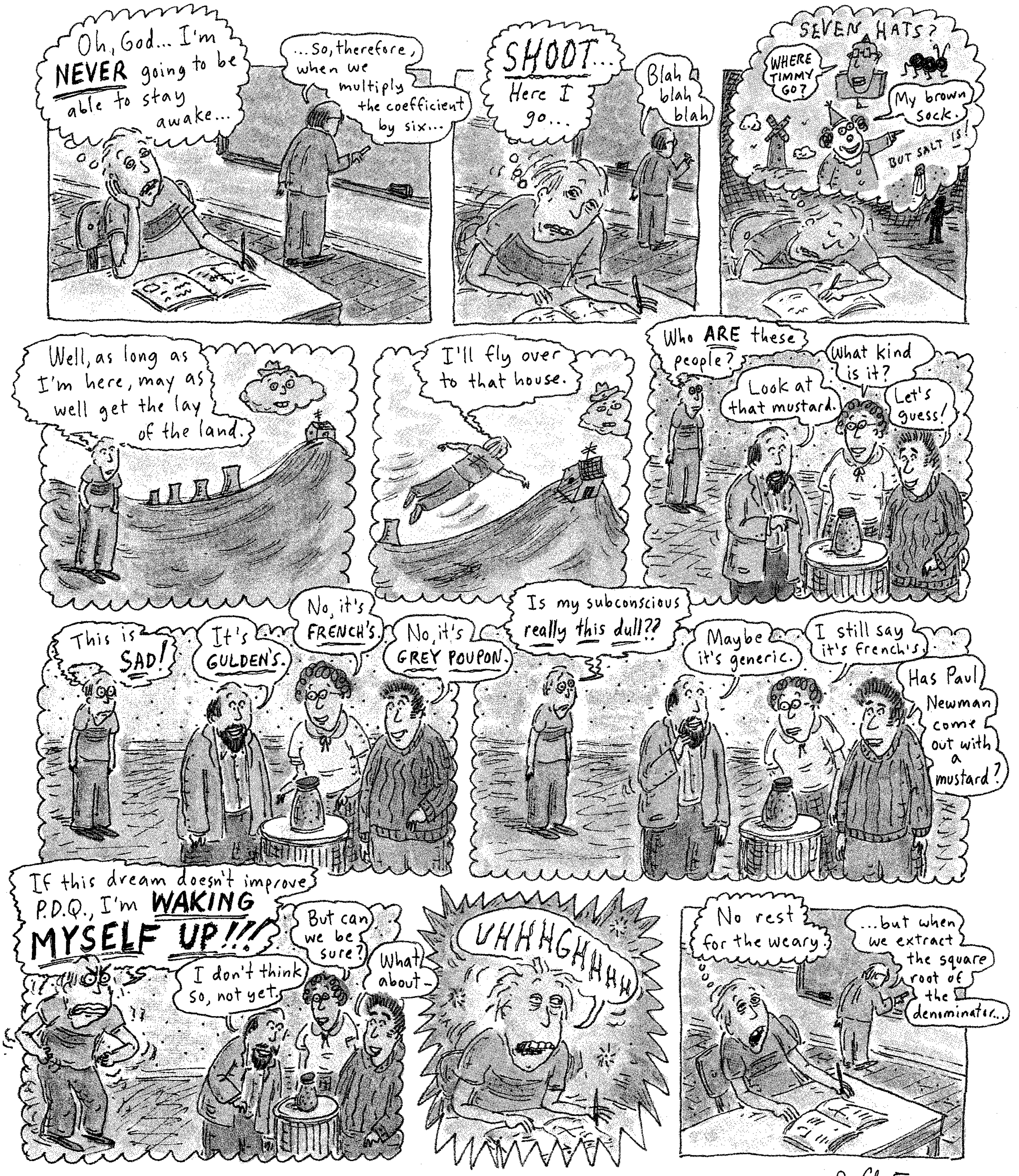
He also designed the buildings so they would be able to absorb the impact of a jet airliner: "I'm sort of a methodical person, so I listed all the bad things that could happen to a building and tried to design for them. I thought of the B-25 bomber, lost in the fog, that hit the Empire State Building in 1945. The 707 was the state-of-the-art airplane then, and the Port Authority was quite amenable to considering the effect of an airplane as a design criterion. We studied it, and designed for the impact of such an aircraft. The next step would have been to think about the fuel load, and I've been searching my brain, but I don't know what happened there, whether in all our testing we thought about it. Now we know what happens—it explodes. I don't know if we considered the fire damage that would cause. Anyway, the architect, not the engineer, is the one who specifies the fire system."

On September 11th, each building took the impact of a 767 (which is nearly twenty per cent heavier than a 707) and stood long enough to allow most of the people below the crash sites—the ninety-fourth floor to the ninety-ninth floor in the north tower, and the seventy-eighth floor to the eighty-fourth floor in the south tower—to escape. Had the buildings toppled immediately, nearly all those survivors would have died, and there would have been huge losses as well in the buildings and streets around the towers. The fact that the terrorists chose to hit the buildings on opposite faces suggests to some that they intended to knock the buildings over—which would have increased the destruction and loss of life. "Ninety-nine per cent of all buildings would collapse immediately when hit by a 767," Jon Magnusson said.

But did the special structural characteristics of these buildings, qualities that made them so resistant to attack from without, also make them vulnerable to collapse from within, once the fires started? If one of the airplanes had hit an older skyscraper, like the Empire State Building, which has a frame structure instead of a tube structure, would the total disaster have been greater (the building falls over immediately) or lesser (the concrete in the building lasts longer in a fire, and the frame structure protects the building from complete collapse)? Of all the difficult questions that the FEMA investigators need to ask about the disaster, this is one of the hardest.

In any fire, it is logical to assume that the weakest link in the structure will be the first to fail. In the towers, the weak link was the floors. "Floor beams or trusses will heat up faster than columns, because they're thinner pieces of steel," W. Gene Corley, the leader of the FEMA team, says. The floors were supported

FIRST-PERIOD ALGEBRA


Oh, God... I'm NEVER going to be able to stay awake...
...So, therefore, when we multiply the coefficient by six...
SHOOT... Here I go...
Blah blah blah
SEVEN HATS?
WHERE TIMMY GO?
My brown sock.
BUT SALT IS!
Well, as long as I'm here, may as well get the lay of the land.
I'll fly over to that house.
Who ARE these people?
Look at that mustard.
What kind is it?
Let's guess!
This is SAD!
It's GULDEN'S.
No, it's FRENCH'S.
No, it's GREY POUPON.
Is my subconscious really this dull??
Maybe it's generic.
I still say it's French's.
Has Paul Newman come out with a mustard?
If this dream doesn't improve P.D.Q., I'm WAKING MYSELF UP!!!
But can we be sure?
I don't think so, not yet.
What about –
UHHHGHHHH
No rest for the weary.
...but when we extract the square root of the denominator...

with sixty-foot-long right angles of steel (on the long sides), and these were bolted, not welded, to the inner and outer columns. "The whole floor system was a very lightweight construction," Eduardo Kausel, a structural engineer at M.I.T., told me. Another engineer described the floors to me as "flimsy." Jerome Connor, also of M.I.T., said, "The weakest link was definitely the connections of the floor trusses to the vertical members." Those connections were protected with the mineral-fibre spray, but most of it was probably knocked off by the impact of the airplanes. Ron Hamburger told me, "If you knock it, that spray-on protection will come off. When I visited the site, I went through the American Express and the Bankers Trust buildings, and I saw large chunks of the fireproofing in those buildings knocked off—and that was only by falling debris, not by an airplane hit. I think we can assume there was a lot of unprotected steel in the towers after the planes hit."

The columns in the core were massive, and were capable of bearing huge gravity loads, but they depended on the floors to provide lateral support. As the floors around the crash site began to give way in the intense fire, ever greater lengths of the core columns, which were already overloaded because of the destruction of exterior columns, became exposed. If you stand an inch-long drinking straw on end and press on it with your finger, you have to press pretty hard before it bends. But if you do the same thing with a seven-inch-long straw it buckles easily. The same principle was at work in the towers' core columns. Once the core columns buckled, the entire weight of the floors above the crash sites came down like a jackhammer on the remaining floors, starting a chain reaction of pancaking floors and buckling columns which demolished the entire structure within fifteen seconds—the same amount of time it took the people who jumped from the top of the towers to hit the pavement. "Once the collapse started, it was essentially a free fall," Eduardo Kausel said. Kausel, for one, thinks the terrorists knew exactly how to make the towers fall—not by knocking them over but by triggering a collapse from within. "You'd need a graduate degree in engineering to know exactly where to hit those buildings to make them fall. Hit them higher, and the weight above the crash sites might not be enough to bring the whole thing down. Hit them lower, and the core columns might have been strong enough to stand up."

"Is it a boy or a girl?"

Of course, it also could have been the case that the core columns were damaged by the airplanes, or weakened by the fires, and that it was the failure in the structural members themselves, rather than the lack of support caused by the collapsing floors, that led to the over-all failure of the structure. The distinction here seems minor when set against the magnitude of the disaster, but it is important when you start thinking about how modern high-rise buildings are designed, and how safe they are. Although the Twin Towers were, in the words of Jon Magnusson, "of all the buildings in the world, the closest to being pure tube buildings," many other high-rises are based on the tube concept, and others have internal cores that are braced by the floors. How many floors would you have to remove in a tube-style building before it collapsed?

Robertson says he has thought a lot about the one-inch-thick cylindrical-steel webbing that was used in the support of the floors. He thought that the round steel rods might not hold spray-on fire protection as well as angled bars, but the contractor, Tishman Construction, could save money by using the cylindrical rods—they were a factory-produced item, and cheaper—and he approved them in the end. "On the other hand, there were other fires in the buildings over the years, and one quite serious one, and the fireproofing on those rods did O.K." As the developer, the Port Authority had the ultimate say in making decisions about building materials, and although all developers are driven by economic considerations, the Port Authority was exceptionally profit-minded. "Remember, this wasn't a corporate headquarters—a monument building," Robertson said. "It was a moneymaking proposition."

Was there any way for the structural engineers and architects involved in building the towers to know that they were going to collapse, and how quickly? Yamasaki died, of cancer, in 1986. Robertson was in Hong Kong. A group of engineers from his office were on their way to the site after the first plane hit, but when the second plane hit they went back to the office or left the area. Most of the Port Authority engineers, including the chief engineer, Frank Lombardi, worked in the north tower, and they were in the stairwell when the second plane hit, unaware of what had happened. Only when they had regrouped in the Marriott Hotel, on the southwest side of the plaza, did they learn about the second plane, and not long after that the upper part of the south tower fell onto the hotel, partially collapsing it. "I thought a bomb had come through the windows," Lombardi told me. "We had no idea of the extent of the damage, and certainly none of us had the information to make a decision to keep the rescue workers who entered the buildings out of them." He added, "I do think it may be a good idea, in the event of something like this happening in the future, to have a structural engineer on the scene, who arrives with the firemen, and makes that cold, objective decision to send people in or not send them. But, first of all, that person would have to have no emotional relationship to the people inside or to the building—I mean, for us, this was our second home—and, secondly, that person would have to be absolutely liability-free. Because that's one hell of a decision to make."

Among the dozens of people I have spoken to recently who are experts in the construction of tall buildings (and many of whom witnessed the events of September 11th as they unfolded), only one said that he knew immediately, upon learning, from TV, of the planes' hitting the buildings, that the towers were going to fall. This was Mark Loizeaux, the president of Controlled Demolition Incorporated, a Maryland-based family business that specializes in reducing tall buildings to manageable pieces of rubble. "Within a nanosecond," he told me. "I said, 'It's coming down. And the second tower will fall first, because it was hit lower down.' "

Before September 11th, the largest building ever to be imploded by accident or design was the J. L. Hudson department store, in Detroit, with 2.2 million square feet of floor space, which C.D.I. "dropped" on October 24, 1998. To do their work, Mark Loizeaux and his brother Doug need to understand the same forces and formulas that structural engineers study, but instead of using that knowledge to erect buildings they use it to take them down. They are structural undertakers, which may explain why Mark, when confronted with the spectacle of the crippled buildings, lacked the sentiment that builders feel for their creations—that innate sympathy which helped blind the engineers of the World Trade towers to the reality of what was about to occur. "I thought, Somebody's got to tell the Fire Department to get out of there," Loizeaux told me. "I picked up the phone, dialled 411, got the number, and tried it—busy. So I called the Mayor's Office of Emergency Management"—which was in 7 World Trade. "All circuits were busy. I couldn't get through."

Loizeaux said he had an enhanced video of the collapses, and he talked about them in a way that indicated he had watched the video more than once. "First of all, you've got the obvious damage to the exterior frame from the airplane—if you count the number of external columns missing from the sides the planes hit, there are about two-thirds of the total. And the buildings are still standing, which is amazing—even with all those columns missing, the gravity loads have found alternate pathways. O.K., but you've got fires—jet-fuel fires, which the building is not designed for, and you've also got lots of paper in there. Now, paper cooks. A paper fire is like a coal-mine fire: it keeps burning as long as oxygen gets to it. And you're high in the building, up in the wind, plenty of oxygen. So you've got a hot fire. And you've got these floor trusses, made of fairly thin metal, and fire protection has been knocked off most of them by the impact. And you have all this open space—clear span from perimeter to core—with no columns or partition walls, so the airplane is going to skid right through that space to the core, which doesn't have any reinforced concrete in it, just sheetrock covering steel, and the fire is going to spread everywhere immediately, and no fire-protection systems are working—the sprinkler heads shorn off by the airplanes, the water pipes in the core are likely cut. So what's going to happen? Floor A is going to fall onto floor B, which falls onto floor C; the unsupported columns will buckle; and the weight of everything above the crash site falls onto what remains below—bringing loads of two thousand pounds per square foot, plus the force of the impact, onto floors designed to bear one hundred pounds per square foot. It has to fall."

Loizeaux said that when he demolishes buildings he sometimes tries to make the top twist and fall sideways, which can generate enough "reverse thrust" to push the rest of the building the other way. "The top part of the south tower almost did fall off, which is what would happen in most buildings. Did you see how, when that top part started to fall, it began to rotate? If that piece had kept going out, it probably would have pushed the rest of the building the other way as it fell. But those long trusses saved the day—they gave way, guided that top downward just like a bullet through the barrel of a gun, and mitigated the damage." He added, "Let me tell you something. Far more people would have died if those buildings had been built differently. A conventional frame building would have fallen immediately—no question. Only a tube structure could have taken that hit and survived."

It is important to bear in mind, when discussing the towers' collapse, that most of the office workers who perished in the attack were trapped above the floors hit by the airplanes. Even if the buildings had stood for hours longer, the majority of them probably couldn't have been saved. Many of the people below the crash site who died in the collapses were the rescue workers, including three hundred and forty-three firemen, who entered the towers after the planes hit.

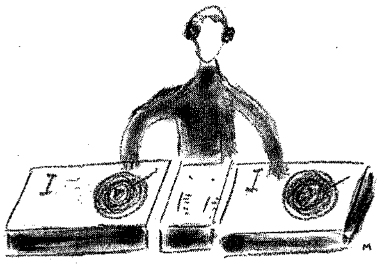
The firemen did what firemen do—they charged into the burning buildings and tried to save lives and put out the fire. There was little or no time to consider the potential for total collapse that was present in the tube structures. The chiefs and commanders were operating on standard F.D.N.Y. procedure on how to fight a high-rise fire: stay below the burning floors, and attack from there. The city's Department of

Buildings enforces the standards for how long the materials used in city buildings should stand up in fires. These standards are based on tests of individual building materials, conducted at testing centers around the country. Each material is subjected to rapidly rising temperatures, to discover the point at which it fails. During construction, the appropriate amount of fire protection is applied to that material to bring its longevity in a fire up to the required amount of time. (Because the towers were owned by the Port Authority, a bi-state agency, they were not subject to New York City fire regulations or inspections, but, according to Alan Reiss, the former director of the World Trade Center, the Port Authority always had a policy of complying with New York City fire codes and inspection procedures.)

Unfortunately, the standard fire scenarios didn't match the conditions in the World Trade towers, in several important ways. In the first place, the scenarios measure only the "fire load," or amount of combustible material, already in the building; the tests don't anticipate additional sources of energy that might be introduced into the building. Second, in calculating how long certain materials will last in a fire most tests don't anticipate the sudden intensity of fires such as those in the World Trade Center; usually, a fire starts small and spreads, so that the curve of temperature over time is a gradual rise to the peak. Nor do the tests anticipate the added stress on structural elements caused by impact, such as that of an airplane—steel fails at lower temperatures when under extreme stress.

New York City firemen are very familiar with the crash of the B-25 into the seventy-eighth and seventy-ninth floors of the Empire State Building, in 1945, which killed fourteen people; the department makes that event part of the standard training that every chief and commander receives. It is often true that those who don't remember history are doomed to repeat it, but it is also sometimes true that those who remember history can be misled by it. In the Empire State Building crash, the ensuing fire was a flash fire, fuelled not by jet fuel but by gasoline (which has a slightly lower heat content); in addition, the B-25 carried only eight hundred gallons of fuel—much less than the ten thousand or more gallons that spilled into each of the towers. As a result, the fire was put out in thirty-five minutes and did limited damage to the building. The fires in the towers were far hotter—they may have burned at close to two thousand degrees—and, because of the way the Empire State Building was "overbuilt," it was, in general, better able to resist fire.

Retired Deputy Chief Vincent Dunn, a forty-two-year veteran of the New York City Fire Department, who is the author of the book "Collapse of Burning Buildings: A Guide to Fireground Safety," told me, "The technology of building high-rises has got way ahead of the ability to fire-protect them adequately." He added, "No one wants to be alarmist, but we in the fire service know that in any high-rise building built since 1970 the fire safety is questionable." Dunn speaks only for himself, but his opinion of the structure of the Twin Towers is shared by others who are closely affiliated with the New York City Fire Department. "Look, from a fire chief's perspective—and I'm not an engineer, but as a fire chief I know buildings—the World Trade Center buildings were not well constructed," Dunn said. "I'd call them fragile buildings. There were no internal columns supporting the floors, and those floor trusses were very lightweight. Essentially, it was a pinned construction, where the exterior walls are the bearing walls. That's the way the old cast-iron buildings in SoHo were built, and, as every firefighter knows, in those buildings the floors collapse in fires. In my opinion, a skeleton steel building would have stood up better. Yes, you get sections falling off the building, maybe even the top part of the building falls off. But you don't get pancaking floors that bring the whole structure down." David Lucht, the director of the Center for Firesafety Studies at Worcester Polytechnic Institute, disagrees with Dunn's assessment of the safety of modern high-rises. "I can understand where the Fire Department is coming from—they don't build 'em like they used to," he said. "And that's true. But in many ways people are safer in high-rise buildings than they are at home." He pointed out that the newer buildings have the benefit of modern sprinkler and alarm systems, along with pressurized stairwells and floors that help keep smoke away from the fire areas. "High-rise buildings have performed amazingly well over the years in fires, although this event will cause both researchers and public officials to take another look at the performance of these buildings."



Dunn said that, had he been at the scene, he would have sent his men into the building. "I don't care how strong they were—if you've got buildings collapsing on firefighters, there's something wrong with the way those buildings were built."

Leslie E. Robertson Associates is assisting the various teams that are investigating the towers' collapse, and Saw-Teen See is on the FEMA team. Robertson told me he was glad that the efforts were going on, but he doubted whether we would ever understand the mechanics of failure precisely. "If we could learn why the buildings collapsed, there would be value in that," he said. "But that other event, in Oklahoma City—that was more quantifiable. This is a huge task—it's probably an impossible task now to sort out all the proper evidence."

Because each steel column used in the exterior of the towers had a mark stamped on it, in theory it would be possible to reassemble the pieces from the damaged floors. But the time and manpower that such an effort would require are beyond FEMA's resources. Besides, the core columns, not the external columns, would yield the most information about the collapses, but the videos and still pictures of the injured buildings don't show the condition of the core columns, and those columns were marked only with paint, which in most cases has disappeared. Robertson said that he and his wife went out to one of the scrap yards in New Jersey where some of the steel is being held, to inspect a piece that one investigator thought had an airplane part attached to it. "But we figured out that that piece of steel was from the fortieth floor, well below either crash site," he said.

Behind Robertson were renderings of what will be two of the tallest buildings in the world, both from the architecture firm of Kohn Pedersen Fox—the Shanghai World Financial Center and an office building in Hong Kong. Robertson is assisting in the design of the structures for both buildings. He said he had met with the developers of the skyscrapers after September 11th and reassured them that the structures of both buildings were sound. "I said that it was not necessary to design buildings with the idea of planes running into them. It's prudent to see what we could do, to make things better, but you can't design for every eventuality." He added, "I suspect tall buildings will always be with us. People need to be close to each other, in order to communicate effectively. But builders and architects are going to have to make the argument for why tall buildings should be built, and why people should move into them."

SPRAY CASHEWS
ZIEGLER

Charlie Thornton, of Thornton-Tomasetti, told me, "One of the things you'll hear is 'Should we use more concrete?' " Thornton's firm did the structural engineering for the Petronas Towers, in Kuala Lumpur, currently the tallest buildings in the world; those buildings have a concrete core and concrete perimeter columns, but that decision was based in part on the fact that Malaysia had no steel industry, and imposes high tariffs on imported steel. "Should we at least require the cores of tall buildings to be reinforced in concrete, which would give them more fire protection and give people a better chance of getting out in a fire?" he went on. "Should we have refuge floors, spaced every ten floors or so, which would allow people some protection from smoke?" But Robertson says, "Thank God we didn't have refuge floors in the World Trade towers—people might have stopped there to regroup, rather than getting out of the buildings as fast as they could."

Every high-rise building represents a balance of power; incorporated into the final design are the various interests of developers, architects, engineers, and firemen. Will September 11th change this hierarchy? The public interest, which is safety, is protected by building codes and laws, but the way those codes are written is not a democratic process. Professional engineers, together with academics and the representatives of construction companies, articulate the "minimum" standard of safety as determined by each constituency. Guy Nordenson, who has expertise in seismic codes, says, "We have a predicament not only for engineering but for planning and design in general. Developers and many designers participate in the economy of wealth, image, and fame, and so they press against that minimum." Nordenson and his associates at Princeton were completing a seismic study for FEMA of the buildings in New York when, after September 11th, they were called, along with the Structural Engineers Association of New York and Charlie Thornton's firm, to help the city check the stability of the buildings around Ground Zero. His opinion is that the collapse of the World Trade towers will change building codes. "The building laws will change—more redundancy, stronger interconnection of parts, all attributes of good seismic design, by the way—as they have after every disaster."

Still, it doesn't make sense to design skyscrapers to withstand the crash of an airliner—the buildings would resemble nuclear silos, and, as the chairman of the Nuclear Regulatory Commission suggested recently, even those structures might not withstand a fully fuelled airplane. Engineers can't be asked to make every building safe from every possible event, yet that is just what people expect, and the engineers try to meet these impossible expectations. Sitting in Robertson's conference room, I said that his structures had saved a lot of people. He said, "A lot of things worked well—people got out. I suppose I'm proud of that." But he was looking toward that unavoidable view from the window. "It's a tremendous responsibility, being an engineer," he said, his voice breaking. "It's a very imperfect process. It's not so beautiful as science." He struggled to keep his composure. "I have a lot of tough nights. I'm still not sleeping. I go to sleep for a little bit, but I wake up thinking—I have so many thoughts."

He put his hands over his eyes, as though that would block out the thoughts. After a minute or so, he went on, "There are all kinds of terrible things that take place on this planet, that nature brings on us. But this event had . . . Not only was it man against man but it was live on television, and we watched it, and you could reach out and touch it"—he stretched out his hand toward the windows where the towers had once stood—"but there was nothing you could do." ♦

FICTION

ALONG THE FRONTAGE ROAD

BY MICHAEL CHABON

PUMPKINS
45¢ / lb.

I don't remember where we used to go to get our pumpkins when I was a kid. I grew up in a Maryland suburb that, in those days, had just begun to lay siege to the surrounding Piedmont farmland, and I suppose we must have driven out to somebody's orchard or farm—one of the places we went to in the summer for corn and strawberries, and in the fall for apples and cider. I do remember the way that my father would go after our pumpkins, once we got them home, with the biggest knife from the kitchen drawer. He was a fastidious man who hated to dirty his hands, in particular with food, but he was also a doctor, and there was something grimly expert about the way he scalped the orange crania, excised the stringy pulp, and scraped clean the pale interior flesh with the edge of a big metal spoon. I remember his compressed lips, the distasteful huffing of his breath through his nostrils as he worked.

Last month, I took my own son down to a vacant lot between the interstate and the Berkeley mudflats. Ordinarily no one would ever go to such a place. There is nothing but gravel, weeds, and the kind of small, insidious garbage that presents a choking hazard to waterfowl. It is a piece of land so devoid of life and interest that from January to October, I'm certain, no one sees it at all; it ceases to exist. Toward the end of the year, however, with a regularity that approximates, in its way, the eternal rolling wheel of the seasons, men appear with trailers, straw bales, fence wire, and a desultory assortment of orange-and-black, or red-and-green, bunting. First they put up polystyrene human skeletons and battery-operated witches, and then, a few weeks later,

BENJAMIN DONALDSON

string colored lights and evergreen swags. Or so I assume. I have no idea, actually, how this kind of business operates. There may be a crew of Halloween men, who specialize in pumpkins, and then one of Christmas men, who bring in the truckloads of spruce and fir. The Halloween men may be largely Iranian, and the Christmas men Taiwanese. And I don't know if someone actually owns this stretch of frontage, or if it lies, despised and all but invisible, open to all comers, a freehold for the predations of enterprising men. But I don't want to talk about the contrast between the idyllic golden falls of my Maryland youth and the freeway hum, plastic skeletons, and Persian music that spell autumn in the disjointed urban almanac of my four-year-old son. I don't want to talk about pumpkins at all, really, or about Halloween, or, God knows, about the ache that I get every time I imagine my little son wandering, in my stead, through the deepening shadows of a genuine pumpkin patch, in a corduroy coat, on a chilly October afternoon back in, say, 1973. I don't mean to imply that we have somehow rendered the world unworthy of our children's trust and attention. I don't believe that, though sometimes I do feel that very implication lodged like a chip of black ice in my heart.

Anyway, Nicky loves the place. Maybe there is something magical to him in the sight of the windswept gray waste transfigured by an anomalous outburst of orange. In past years, the rubber witch hands and grinning skulls had intimidated him, but not enough to prevent him from trying to prolong our visits past the limits of my patience and of my tolerance for the aforementioned ache in my chest. This year, however, was different, in a number of ways. This year he took the spooky decorations in stride, for one thing.

"Dad. Look. Look, Dad. There's a snake in that skull's eyehole," he said.

We were just getting out of the car. The gravel parking strip was nearly empty; it was four o'clock on a Monday afternoon, with three weeks still to go until Halloween. So I guess we were a little early. But we had both wanted to get out of the house, where ordinary sounds—a fork against a plate, the creak of a stair tread—felt like portents, and you could not escape the smell of the flowers, heaped everywhere, as if some venerable mobster had died. In fact the deceased was a girl of seventeen weeks, a theoretical daughter startled in the darkness and warmth of her mother's body, or so I imagine it, by a jet of cool air and a fatal glint of light. It was my wife who had suggested that Nicky and I might as well go and pick out the pumpkin for that year.

There was only one other car in the lot, a late-model Firebird, beer-cooler red. Its driver's-side door stood open. In the front passenger seat I saw a little boy, black, not much older than my Nicky. The Firebird's radio was on, and the keys were in the ignition: a sampled Clyde Stubblefield beat vied with the insistent pinging of the alarm that warned of the open car door. The little boy was looking out, toward a small brown structure, beyond the wire fence, that in my three years of visiting this forlorn place had escaped my attention completely. It was hardly bigger than a drive-in photomat. On its sign there was a picture of a fish struggling with a bobber and a hook, and the single word "Bait." From the muscle car, the bait shop, and a deadened air of resentment exuded by the kicking, kicking foot of the little boy left alone, I inferred that he was waiting for his father.

"What if that snake was for real?" Nicky said, pointing to the skull that sat atop a bale of straw. It was hollow, like the genuine article, and some clever person had arranged a rubber snake so that it coiled in and out of the eye sockets and jaws. Nicky approached it now, boldly, one hand plunged into the rear of his polar-fleece trousers to scratch at his behind.

"That would be very cool," I said. "But it's only rubber."

"Thank goodness."

"Can we get a skull, too, and put a snake inside it?"

"We only do pumpkins in our family."

"Is that because we're Jewish?"

"Why, yes, it is," I said. "Come on, Nick." I tugged his hand out of his pants and gave him a helpful nudge in the direction of the pumpkins. "Start shopping."

The pumpkins lay spilt like marbles in scattered bunches around the cashier's stand, which was tiny, a rudimentary wooden booth painted red and white to remind somebody—myself alone, perhaps—of a barn. Straw bales stood posed awkwardly, here and there, exuding a smell of cut grass which only intensified my sense of having borne my son into a base and diminished world. There was also straw strewn on the ground, I suppose to provide a rural veneer for the demolition-rubble paving material of the vacant lot. And there was a scarecrow, a flannel shirt and bluejeans hastily stuffed with crumpled newspaper, and token shocks of straw protruding from the cuffs and throat of the shirt. The legs of the bluejeans hung empty from the knee, like the trousers of a double amputee. The head was a pumpkin fitted out with a "Friday the 13th"-style goalie's mask. I forbid myself, absolutely, to consider the proposition that in the orchards of my youth it would never have occurred to anyone to employ a serial-killer motif as a means of selling Halloween pumpkins to children.

Nicky walked slowly among the pumpkins, pondering them with the toe of his sneaker. If the past two years were any guide, he was not necessarily looking for the largest, the roundest, or the most orange. The previous lucky victims had both been rather oblong and irregular, dented and warty specimens that betrayed their kinship to gourds, and scarred with that gritty cement that sometimes streaks the skin of pumpkins. Last year's had not even been orange at all but the ivory that lately seemed, at least in our recherché corner of California, to have become popular. I had no idea what Nicky's criteria for selecting a pumpkin might be. But I had remarked certain affinities between my son and the character of Linus in "Peanuts," and liked to imagine that he might be looking for the most sincere.

"Cute," said the man in the cashier's stand. He was of indeterminate ethnicity—Arab, Mexican, Israeli, Armenian, Uzbek—middle-aged, with a grizzled mustache and thick aviator-style glasses. He sat behind a table laid out with a steel cash box, a credit-card-press, a cellular telephone, and five demonstration models, XS, S, M, L, and XL, priced according to size from ten to twenty-two dollars. "How old is he?"

"Four," I said.

"Cute," the pumpkin man said again. I agreed with him, of course, but the adjective was offered without much enthusiasm and after that we let the subject drop. A door banged, and I looked across the lot. A man was walking from the bait shack out to the frontage road. He was tall and light-skinned, with a kettledrum chest and the kind of fat stomach that somehow manages to look hard: the body of a tight end. He wore white high-tops, big as buckets, barely recognizable as shoes. On his head was a Raiders cap, bill to the back, on his chin the quick sketch of a goatee. He nipped around the fence where it met the frontage road, approached the car from the driver's side, and dropped into the bucket seat, with his back to the boy. The boy said something, his voice rising at the end in a question. The man offered only a low monosyllable in reply. He reached one hand under his seat and felt around. A moment later his hand emerged, holding what looked to my not entirely innocent eye like a rolled zip-lock baggie. Then the man stood, and I heard the boy ask him another question that I couldn't make out.

"When I say so," the man replied. He walked back around the fence and disappeared into the bait shack. The boy in the Firebird turned and, as if he had felt me watching, looked over at me. We were perhaps twenty feet apart. There was no expression on his face at all. I suppressed an impulse to avert my gaze from his, though his blank stare unnerved me. Instead I nodded, and smiled. He smiled back, instantly, a great big winning smile that involved every feature of his face.

"That your kid?" he said.

I nodded.

"He getting a pumpkin."

"Yep."

The boy glanced over at the bait shack. Then he threw his legs across the driver's seat and slid himself out of the car. He was a handsome kid, dark and slender, with a stubbly head and big, sleepy eyes. His clothes were neat and a little old-fashioned, stiff bluejeans rolled at the ankle, a sweater vest over a white-collared shirt, as if he had been dressed by an aunt. But he had the same non-Euclidean shoes as his father, or as the man I assumed was his father. He took another look toward the bait shack and then walked over to where I was standing.

"What he going to be for Halloween?"

"He's still trying to make up his mind," I said. "Maybe a cowboy."

"A cowboy?" He looked appalled. It was a hopelessly lame, outmoded, inexplicable thing for a little boy to want be. I might as well have said that Nicky was planning to go trick-or-treating as a Scotsman, or as Johnny Appleseed.

"Or he was thinking maybe a cat," I said.

I felt something bump against my leg: it was Nicky, pressing his face to my thigh. I looked down and saw that he was carrying a remarkably tiny, rusty-red pumpkin, no bigger than a grapefruit. "Hey, Nick. What's up?"

There was, heavily, profoundly, no reply.

"What's the matter?"

The voice emerged from the fabric of my pant leg.

"Who is that guy you're talking to?"

"I don't know," I said. I smiled again at the kid from the Firebird. For some reason I never feel whiter than when I am smiling at a black person. "What's your name?"

"Andre," he said. "Why he got such a little one?"

"I don't know."

"How he going to fit a candle in that midget?"

"That's a very good question," I said. "Nicky, why did you choose such a small one?"

Nicky shrugged.

"Did you already get yours?" I said to Andre.

He nodded. "Got me a big pumpkin."

"Go on, Nick," I said. "Go find yourself a nice big pumpkin. Andre's right—you won't be able to put a candle in this one."

"I don't want a big pumpkin. I don't want to put a candle in it. I don't want you to cut it open with a knife."

He looked up at me, his eyes shining. A tear sprang loose and arced like a diver down his cheek. You would have thought I was asking him to go into the henhouse and bring me a neck to wring for supper. He had never before shown such solicitude for the annual sacrificial squash. But lately you never knew what would make Nicky cry.

"I want to call Mommy," he said. "On the cell phone. She will tell you not to cut up my pumpkin."

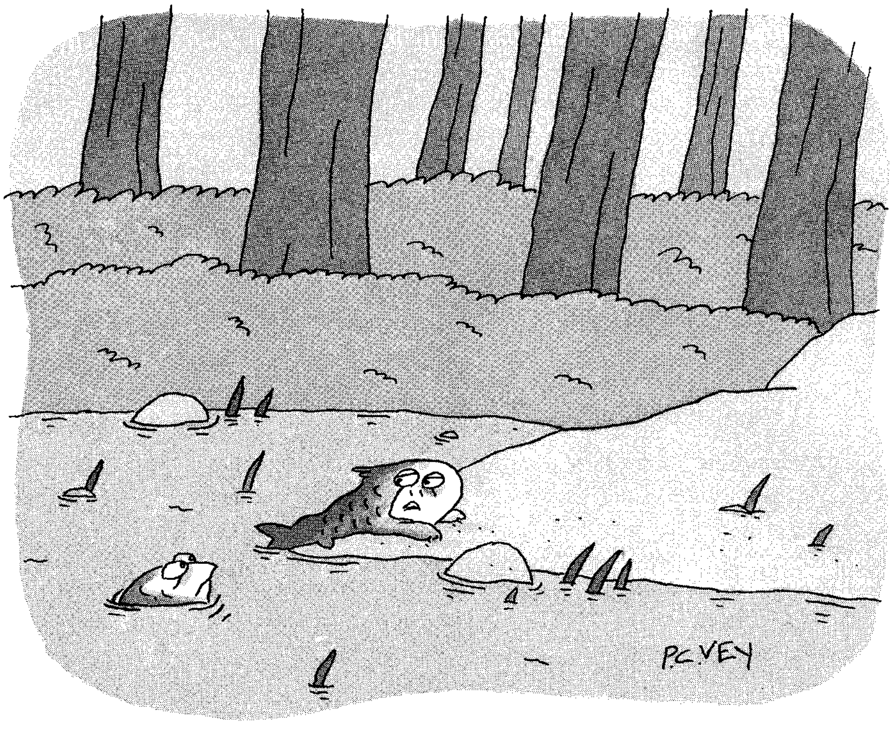
"We can't bother Mommy," I said. "She's resting right now."

"Why is she resting?"

"You know why."

"I don't want her to rest anymore. I want to call her. Call her, Dad. She'll tell you not to cut it up."

"It ain't alive," Andre argued. He was taking such an interest in our family's pumpkin choice that I was certain his earlier boast had been a lie. Andre had no big pumpkin waiting for him at home. His father was a drug dealer who would not bother to take his son shopping for a pumpkin. This conversation was as close



"I'm going to get a paper. Be right back."

to the purchase of an actual pumpkin as Andre had any reason to expect. These may not in fact have been certainties so much as assumptions, and racist ones at that. I will grant you this. But what kind of father would leave his kid alone in a car, with the door open, at the side of a road that skirted the edge of a luckless and desolate place? What kind of man would do that? "It don't hurt them to be cut."

"I want this one," said Nicky. "And I'm going to name it Kate."

I shook my head.

"You can't do that," I said.

"Please?"

"No, honey," I said. "We don't name our pumpkins."

"We don't believe in it?"

"That's right." I did not want him telling all the people who set foot on our front porch the name that we had been tossing around the house over the past month or so, with an innocence that struck me now as wanton and foolish. My wife and I were given no real choice in the matter, and yet every time I look at Nicky's fuzzy knees poking out of his short pants, or smell peanut butter on his breath, or attend to his muttered nocturnal lectures through the monitor that we have never bothered to remove from his bedroom, I cannot shake the feeling that in letting ourselves be persuaded by mere facts and statistics, however damning, we made an unforgivable mistake. I had stood by once in an emergency room as doctors and nurses strapped my son, flailing, to a table to stitch up a gash in his forehead. I could picture, all too clearly, how your child looked at you as you betrayed him into the hands of strangers.

"Andre!"

The father was coming toward us, his gait at once lumbering and methodical. When I looked at him, I saw where Andre had learned to drain the expression from his face.

"What I tell you to do?" he said, softly but without gentleness. He did not acknowledge me, Nicky, the ten thousand pumpkins that lay all around us. "Boy, get back in that car."

Andre said something in a voice too low for me to hear.

"What?"

"Can I get a pumpkin?" he repeated.

The question was apparently so immoderate that it could not be answered. Andre's father pulled his cap down more firmly on his head, hitched up his pants, and spat into the straw at his feet. These appeared to be a suite of gestures intended to communicate the inevitable outcome if Andre did not return immediately to the car. Andre had reset his own face to zero. He turned, walked back to the Firebird, and got in. This time he went around to the big red door on his side of the car and heaved it open.

"Your son is a nice boy," I said.

The man looked at me, for the first and last time.

"Uh-huh," he said. "All right."

I was just another pumpkin to him—dumb and lolling amid the straw bales, in the middle of a place that was no place at all. He went to the car, got in, and slammed the door. The pinging of the alarm ceased. The engine came awake with a rumble, and the Firebird went scrabbling out of the lot and back onto the frontage road. Nicky and I watched them drive off. I saw Andre turn back, his eyes wide, his face alight and hollowed with an emotion that I could not help but interpret as reproach. I had abandoned him to a hard fate, one that I might at least have tried, somehow, to prevent. But there was nothing that I could have done. I didn't have any illusions about that. I dressed and fed my child, I washed his body, I saw that he got enough sleep. I had him inoculated, padded his knees and encased the twenty-eight bones of his skull in high-impact plastic when he got on his bicycle and pedalled down our street. But in the end, when the world we have created came to strap him to a table, I could only stand behind the doctors and watch.

I took Nicky's half-grown red runt and balanced it on my palm.

"Hey, Nick," I said. "Listen. You can name it Kate if you want to."

"I don't want it," Nicky said. "I want to get a bigger one."

"All right."

"Kate can have that one."

"All right."

"Because she didn't get to have a pumpkin, since she didn't get to ever be alive."

"Good thinking," I said.

"But I still don't want to cut it up," he said. Then he went back again into the world of pumpkins, looking for the one that would best suit his unknown purposes. ♦

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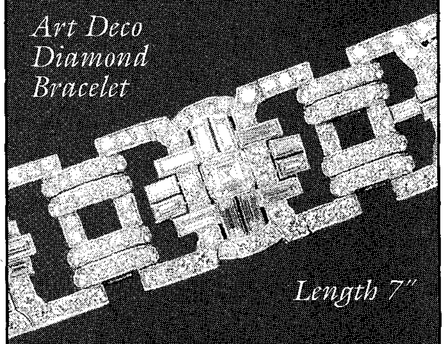

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THE CRITICS

THE CURRENT CINEMA

NOBODY BEATS THE WIZARD

The filming of Harry Potter.

BY ANTHONY LANE

Who does not know of Harry Potter, or of his début, this week, on the big screen? Anthropologists returning from the Amazon Basin have whispered excitedly of tiny, pre-industrial clans, clustered along minor tributaries, who have never heard of Harry or of his creator, J. K. Rowling, but I think we can dismiss such rumors as patronizing fantasy. On the other hand, just because all sentient earthlings of reading age have turned into fanatical Potterites, I can see no reason to humor their insatiable demand that the movie "Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone" should, before all else, be faithful to the book. If Verdi found it in himself to mess about with Shakespeare, then what the director, Chris Columbus, and his screenwriter, Steve Kloves, choose to inflict on Ms. Rowling is entirely their affair. The question should therefore be: Is this movie faithful to itself? Does it, like the better make of broomstick, have a life of its own?

The plot is by now Homerically familiar. That Harry (Daniel Radcliffe) is an orphan goes without saying; it is most impractical, not to mention distasteful, to enter the canon of English children's literature without first being purged of one's parents. Harry, however, is also a wizard, raised by an aunt (Fiona Shaw) and uncle (Richard Griffiths) who are not only mean and scowling but irretrievably human. At the age of eleven, he is summoned back to the company of his peers, to be educated at Hogwarts School. There he acquires a pair of friends, Hermione (Emma Watson) and Ron (Rupert Grint), a yellow-haired nemesis by the name of Draco Malfoy (Tom Felton), and a full complement of instructors: Dumbledore (Richard Harris), the beaming headmaster, and his purse-mouthed deputy, Professor McGonagall (Maggie Smith); Professors Snape (Alan Rickman) and Quirrell (Ian Hart), expert in the murkier arts; and a giant called Hagrid (Robbie Coltrane), who is, of course, gentleness itself.

Columbus was right to shoot the movie in England, and to summon the kind of character actors in which that nation has always specialized; they are like counties, or provincial parishes, made flesh. His feeling for voices, though, and for the social positioning of his characters, seems less than secure, and you sense that some of the performers are taking the enterprise more lightly than others. Ian Hart, normally a pointed and militant presence onscreen, is strangely vague on this occasion—a pity, for his role turns out to be crucial. Perhaps he loses definition when denied the chance to speak in his natural accent, just as Maggie Smith, crisply coy with her Scottish tones, is allowed to veer, a little too close for comfort, toward the dotage of Miss Jean Brodie. By and large, it is the actors who treat the conceit of wizardry with the greatest seriousness—like grandparents levelling calmly with small children, instead of fobbing them off with fond condescension—who draw nearest to the imaginings of the author. Particular credit is due to John Hurt, who invests

The true special effects in "Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone" are not contrivance

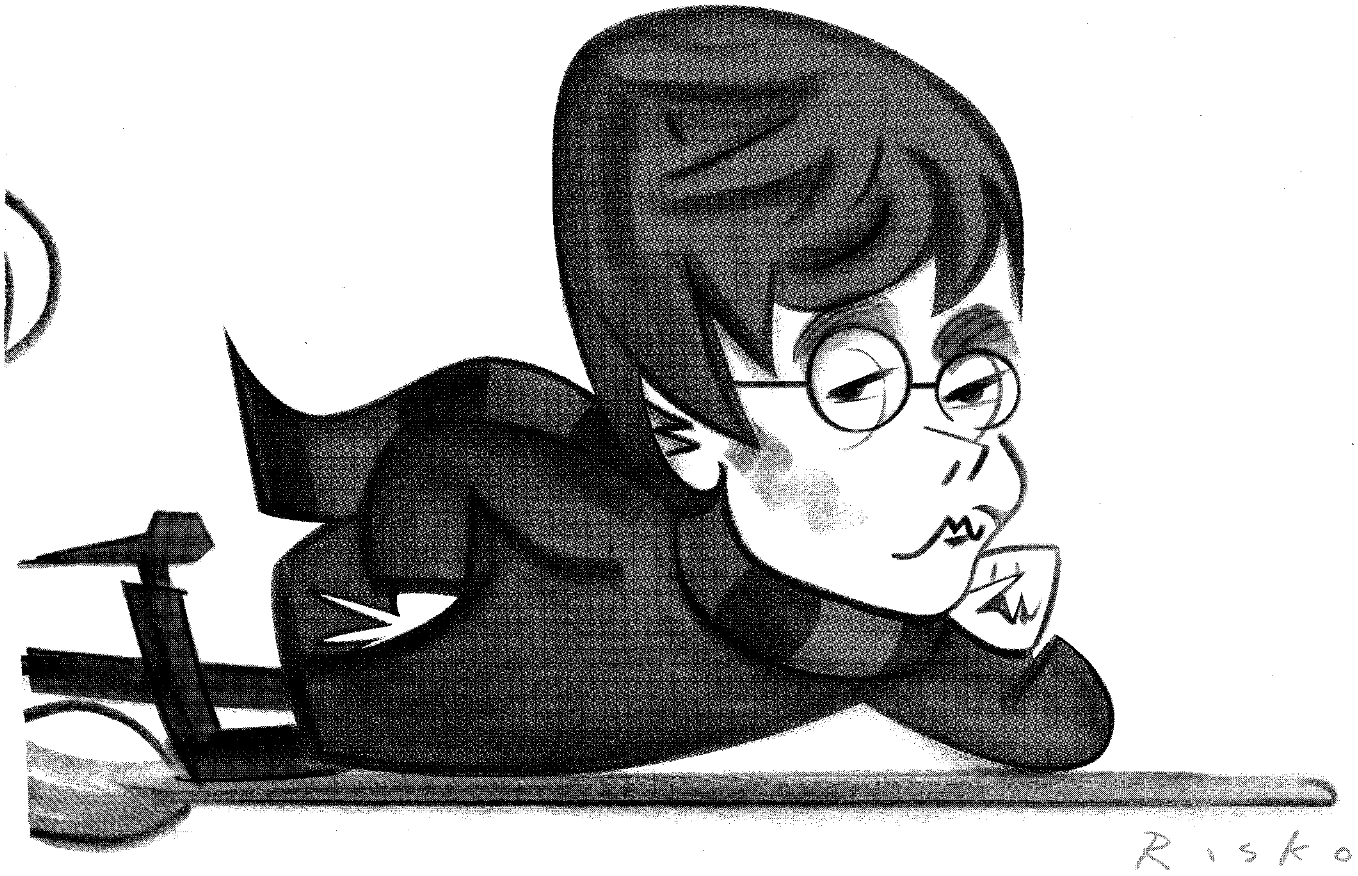
TOP: KOREN, 7/25/83; BOTTOM: ROBERT RISKO

his brief appearance as a purveyor of wands with precisely the right blend of awe and wit; he knows the tale of Harry's beginnings, and he signals his concern at what manner of end the boy may have in store.

In short, Hurt shadows an enjoyable picture with fear—a dash of darkening that does not come again until Alan Rickman strides into his classroom. Ever since "Die Hard," Rickman has stolen movies as though under cover of darkness, and he filches this one with a single speech: "I can teach you how to bottle fame, brew glory, and even put a stopper in death." His Professor Snape is a clear relative of his Reverend Slope in the BBC adaptation of Trollope; in both cases, he makes you believe, instantly, in the potency of his own beliefs, and he never scruples to make the drama watch and wait, as it were, while he unrolls some tasty phrasing from his tongue. At two and a half hours, this is not a hurried film, yet still it finds no time to linger and investigate a mood; there is plenty to dazzle, but dangerously little to frighten or touch you to the quick. The Quidditch sequence, for some reason, is filmed at such cockamamie speed that we don't really get the chance to follow what's going on; it reminded me of a George Lucas setup, which is never good news. Far more beautiful are the portraits that line the staircases of Hogwarts, and that rustle into life as the pupils pass. Watch the painting behind Harry's bed in the hospital wing; as he convalesces, we see a figure in the gloomy picture rise and soothe a patient of her own. That strikes me as a true special effect: not a contrivance that shows itself off but a scrap of magic that gestures in sympathy toward the human.

At the other extreme, we have the climax of the film, and the emergence of Voldemort the villain. We wait with open mouths, and what do we get? Pure graphics: computer-generated imagery, writhing in anguish—in need of the sorcerer's stone, apparently, although it looked to me as if the forces of ultimate evil were badly wanting the men's room. But then the entire final act of the movie, in which Harry and his playmates dice with varieties of death, including neck-wrapping roots and murderous chessmen, has a definite air of the secondhand; I caught a blast of Indiana Jones, and a more recent whiff of the Mummy. Rowling fans will point out that all these obstacles crop up in the original, but that only indicates how cinematically she conceived her saga from the beginning. Such smart practice lent the books both pungency and pace, but it also meant that, if filmmakers simply adhered to the text—if they followed instructions—they risked venturing onto ground that would be, for movie audiences, old hat.

"Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone" is, despite its trickery, that plainest and least surprising of artifacts: the work of art that is exactly the sum of its parts, neither more nor less. It does the job, and, considering that it was directed by the man responsible for "Mrs. Doubtfire," "Stepmom," and the "Home Alone" films, we should be grateful that it does so without inducing emesis. The child performers—who are, justly, given lead billing above their elders—are forthright and credible, especially Emma Watson, as the witch-haired Hermione. That she, as a bossy swot, should be made welcome by the hero is a new development in the



s of magic that gesture in sympathy toward the human. Daniel Radcliffe plays the hero.

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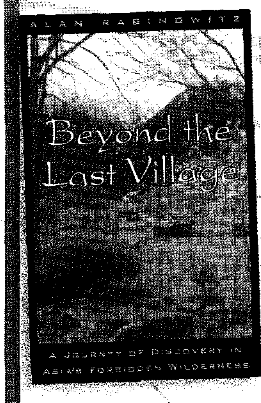

—E.O. Wilson, author of *Consilience* and *Naturalist*

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genre; until Rowling came along, there was no greater crime, within the bounds of the school story, than to be too clever by half. But then only a woman could have done as Rowling did; no man would have dared to revive the prep-school setting, for fear of being thought archaic and uncool. Her genius was to realize that the very formalities of the tradition—the inter-house rivalry, the sporting slang—were in themselves amusing, and that the stuffy could be made mysterious once more. To almost every viewer of the film, Hogwarts will be the sheerest invention; to those who attended British boarding schools, everything about it, from the pre-term purchase of arcane clothing to the London train brimming with whey-faced new boys, feels like grinding neorealism—a blast, either hallowed or horrific, from an all too insistent past.

This distinction comes to mind when one inspects the face of Daniel Radcliffe. He is friendly and confident: the Harry, I would guess, that we had in our mind's eye. But there is a tingle of knowingness in him, a refusal to be taken aback, that goes beyond British grit; in short, he looks slightly too old for wonder, and you never really doubt that he will cope. (Gossips reported that Radcliffe's voice broke near the end of filming, and that he had to be dubbed for a handful of lines.) Through no fault of his own, he has the air not of an eleven-year-old, poised between innocence and apprehension, but of a budding teenager; the movie patches him together with Hermione as a pal, yet, if I were his age, I would already be rolling a pencil under her desk and trying to look up her skirt. (Rowling, acute as ever, knew this; she had Harry flushing with awkwardness at Hermione's embrace.) "Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone" can hardly fail to lure the crowd, as the books have drawn their millions of readers; but, unlike the fiction, it leaves no aftertaste—no sense of anything truly momentous being at stake. The tests that Harry undergoes are fun to observe, but they remain just that, whereas Rowling devised them as the trials, however comically disguised, of a young soul, confronted with the call to grow up. Thanks to Warner Bros., Harry Potter is busy answering that call; the second movie about him will start shooting two days after the first one comes out. ♦

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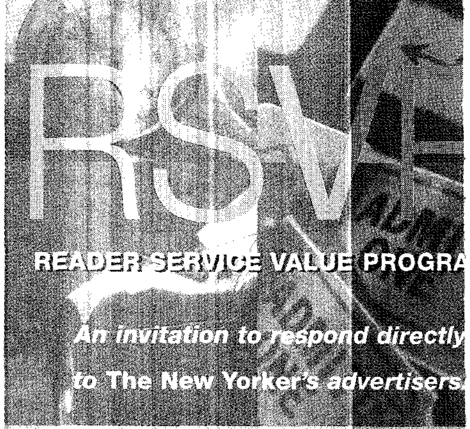
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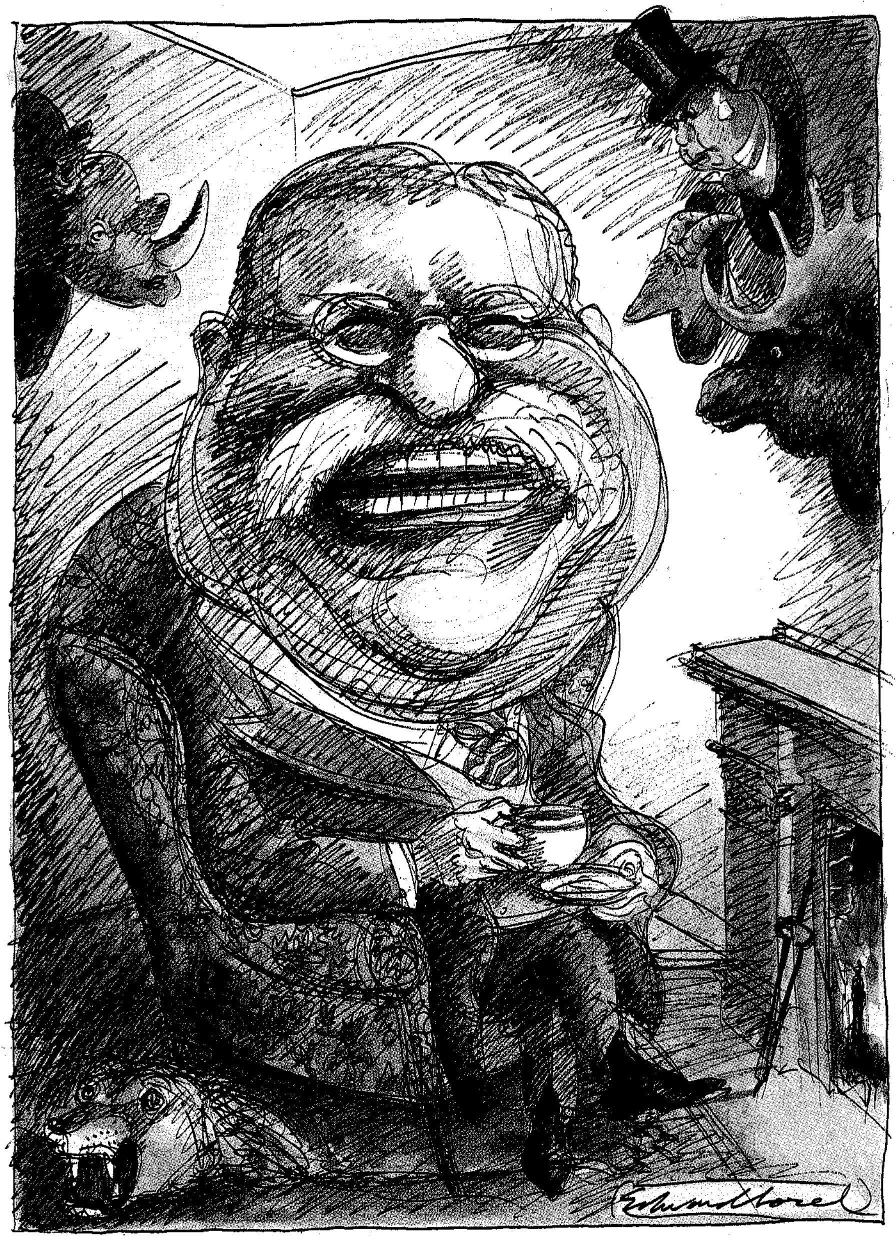
PURE ACT

Teddy Roosevelt talked tough, but as President he was a peacemaker.

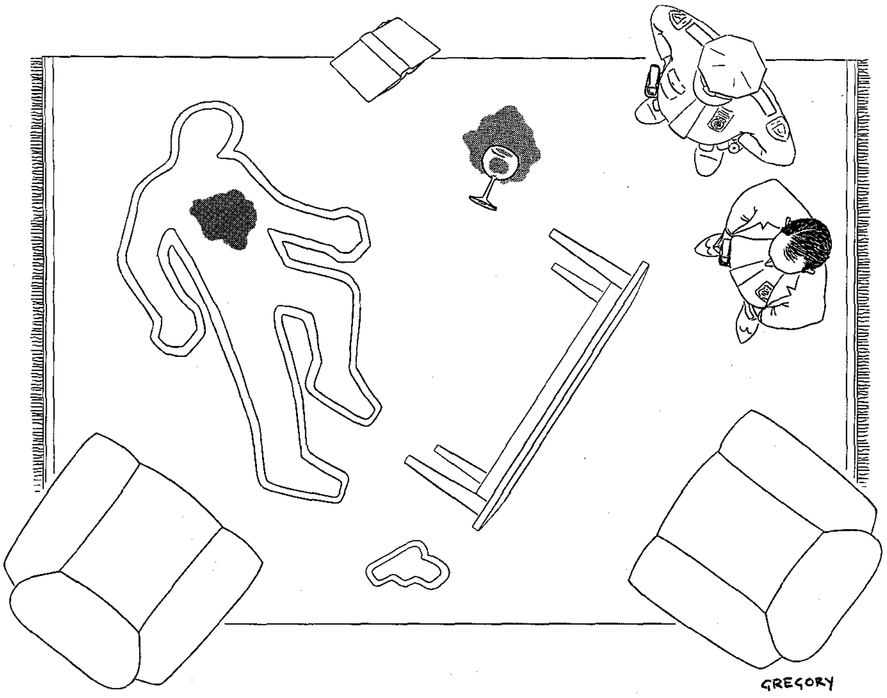
BY NICHOLAS LEMANN



When Roosevelt wanted to take a break from his busy life, he ran the country.

For the past few weeks, I've been toting an advance copy of Edmund Morris's "Theodore Rex" (Random House; $35) around Washington, reading between appointments. It has attracted stares of curiosity of a kind that I can't imagine many other historical tomes would draw in the capital. Theodore Roosevelt was already in vogue in Washington before September 11th, and he's probably even more so now. He was the first thoroughly modern President, an international celebrity who treated everything important that happened anywhere in the world as his business, and who travelled in a great cloud of aides and reporters. The blandness that the Presidency now imposes hadn't settled in, though. T.R. was blunt and vivid, unafraid to offend. Not for him the current Republican reluctance to acknowledge the necessity of a powerful national government; he was the first President to call for a federal income tax, and he greatly expanded Washington's regulatory power over the economy, its land management of the West, and its role in world affairs. He was, for his day, relatively liberal on issues like race relations and workers' rights. He was the furthest thing from a tool of Wall Street and big business. Taking office exactly a hundred years ago, after a terrible surprise attack by a fanatical terrorist—that is, the assassination of President William McKinley, by the anarchist Leon Czolgosz—Roosevelt unwaveringly led the nation to a confident greatness. Hence his present-day appeal. He seems utterly free of the alleged faults of his party, while still being recognizably Republican, especially in the toughness department.

Roosevelt's protean image didn't require the wizardry of handlers. He had a kind of genius of endeavor—he was "pure act," as Henry Adams put it. A couple of years into Roosevelt's Presidency, Morris reminds us, a publisher brought out a fourteen-volume edition of his published works; the man had just turned forty-five, and writing was a sideline for him, done in the interstices between a political career, military adventures, ranching, big-game hunting, travelling, natural-history investigations, and stewardship of a large, active, and evidently happy family. He knew everybody worth knowing, from Buffalo Bill to Upton Sinclair, from Andrew Carnegie to John Muir. In 1903, his friend Nicholas Murray Butler, the president of Columbia University, wrote to inquire what, as President of the United States, he was currently reading; he lengthily replied (during his relatively short life, he wrote some hundred and fifty thousand letters) with a list of a hundred and fourteen titles, including books by Herodotus, Thucydides, Euripides, Shakespeare, Dante, Macaulay, Carlyle, Jack London, and Hamlin Garland. In the White House, he engaged in such martial arts as boxing, wrestling, jujitsu, and something called singlesticks, and when he wanted off-site exercise he got on a horse and galloped wildly through Rock Creek



"Notice how the rug really ties the crime scene together."

Park. He was operated on, for a deep-seated infection of the leg, without anesthesia. He was responsible for such durable phrases as "the bully pulpit," "my hat is in the ring," "malefactors of great wealth," "muckrakers," "the strenuous life," and "speak softly and carry a big stick," and he was indirectly responsible for the Teddy bear. He had a great "story," as a present-day political consultant would put it: the rich, asthmatic princeling self-transformed into an ultramasculine war hero. To imagine that leaders of the past were simply larger souls than those of our time is usually just a seductive fantasy, but in Roosevelt's case it's probably true.

Once you get past his basic attractiveness, Roosevelt—like the other great heroes of Republican Washington, Lincoln and Churchill—doesn't really fit into modern politics. In some ways, he was farther to the left than just about anybody who holds elective office today; even Bernie Sanders and Paul Wellstone don't discuss rich people and big corporations with the open hostility that Roosevelt did. From the White House in 1907, he wrote to a friend, "I neither respect nor admire the huge monied men to whom money is the be-all and the end-all of existence; to whom the acquisition of untold millions is the supreme goal of life, and who are too often utterly indifferent as to how these millions are obtained." At the same time, he was unabashedly an upper-class Victorian, who dressed in black tie for dinner even at his summer house. In matters of cultural tone—such as the robust and evident pleasure he took in killing (not just animals but, in the Spanish-American War, people), or his warnings about the danger of "race suicide"—he was farther to the right than any contemporary Republican politician.

Roosevelt let it all hang out: one would be hard pressed to think of someone less concealed, or more flamboyantly expressive. ("You must always remember that the President is about six," said one of his closest friends, a British diplomat named Cecil Spring Rice.) So Edmund Morris could not be further from the predicament he found himself in when, having published "The Rise of Theodore Roosevelt" (1979), he was made the authorized biographer of one of the most psychologically inaccessible Presidents we've had, Ronald Reagan. Morris, essentially throwing up his hands at the prospect of getting Reagan down on paper through the standard techniques of biography, resorted to a variety of forays into the borderland between fact and fiction, and he was pilloried for it. Now he practically exudes relief at being reunited with his true subject. The old pep is back in his prose. You can feel him feeling that he's got his guy's number. His relationship with Roosevelt is not so much worshipful as familial—there's lots of affectionate teasing, and little resort to the solemn encomium, though this is, without question, an admiring portrait.

Beneath the joy of the reunion, however, lurks a difficulty. Roosevelt's rise, which was detailed in Morris's first volume, was fabulously eventful, featuring a tragic early widowerhood, removal to the remote West, New York political crusades, and, as the capper, the Battle of San Juan Hill and the consequent elevation to the Vice-Presidency. His post-Presidential years were possibly even more packed with action. In his final decade, T.R. undertook a long African safari during which he and his son Kermit slew some three hundred wild beasts; triumphantly toured Europe; survived a bout of tropical disease in the Amazonian wilderness and an assassination attempt in Milwaukee; turned viciously against his two successors as President; founded a third party and tried to retake the White House; and attempted to raise a regiment and fight in the First World War. By contrast, his Presidency, the period covered by "Theodore Rex," might have been the most pacific period of his life. He seems to have been one of those superdominant people who are megalomaniacal when out of power but restrained when in it. Nobody could have been more rhetorically bellicose than Roosevelt was, but as President he was mainly a peacemaker (and, indeed, he won the Nobel Peace Prize). It is true that he stole Panama from Colombia, but it was in the guise of national independence for the Panamanians, and no shots were fired. He ended a war between Russia and Japan, averted one between Germany and Venezuela, and settled a Franco-German dispute over the governance of Morocco. He established the practice of Presidents intervening in labor disputes when he prevented a strike, on the verge of winter in a coal-heated nation, in the anthracite region of Pennsylvania.

Complicated and successful negotiations are difficult to dramatize. Most of the other significant features of Roosevelt's Presidency present the same problem. Roosevelt initiated antitrust litigation against the railroads, nudged the Republican Party away from its single-minded preoccupation with tariff protection, worked with J. P. Morgan to stave off a financial collapse in 1907, and pushed for Cuban trade reciprocity. He established many national parks, forests, and monuments, strengthened the Interstate Commerce Commission, created the Department of Commerce and Labor, regulated railroad freight rates, acquired a lot of new ships for the Navy, and took on the race issue in a minor way by having Booker T. Washington to dinner at the White House and by appointing a handful of blacks to federal office in the South. It was part of Roosevelt's achievement, in these cases, that the opposition to him was civil, largely taking the form of speeches and written attacks, when it might just as easily have been violent, especially given the character of American life at the time.

Because of Morris's experience with Reagan, in which he had greater access to a working White House than any writer has ever had, he knows the extent to which the Presidency is an administrative job, involving many minor appointments, technical matters, routine events and statements, intense battles with people who will soon be forgotten, and the handling of pressing problems that turn out to be temporary. We are in the middle of a boom in popular Presidential biography, with Richard Reeves, David McCullough, Michael Beschloss, Robert Caro, and others all hard at work alongside Morris, and that may make the job look easier than it is. To succeed, a biographer usually has to limit himself carefully to a few dramatic moments, or mine a seam of pure archival gold, or prune details while forcefully explaining why everything matters.

Two other Roosevelt books are coming out now, a very short biography by Louis Auchincloss and a one-volume selection of his letters, edited by H. W. Brands, a professor of history at Texas A. & M. All three books bring to mind Richard Hofstadter's observation, half a century ago, that the Progressives were a displaced élite trying to regain through government "reform" the power that had been taken from them by the rise of industrial capitalism. T.R. was born, in 1858, into one of the richest families in New York, but by the time he became President the Roosevelts were only ordinarily rich. Shorthand terms for the people who had passed them financially, such as "Newport" or "the Four Hundred," are always used pejoratively in T.R.'s correspondence. He liked to think of himself as standing at the head of a great army of decent, self-reliant merchants, artisans, farmers, and business proprietors who could protect the country from the exploitative trusts, on the one hand, and the proto-revolutionary immigrant masses, on the other, but who needed the right governmental instruments with which to do so.

Morris is not one to take a synthetic or an analytic approach to a subject; he always zooms in for the closeup. Nearly all historians, whether academic or popular, write from a position outside their primary sources, drawing on them in a voice of authorial mastery. Morris writes from inside, presenting everything in scenario fashion, with characters and action and dialogue, in energetic prose, and with little overt authorial presence. He takes us through the Roosevelt Presidency practically month by month, relentlessly trying to make a bureaucratic history cinematic. He intercuts, "Godfather" style, between separate but simultaneous dramas; gets inside people's heads when he doesn't quite have the right; and, à la Dickens, conveys people's inner lives by describing their physical peculiarities, so that William Howard Taft's corpulence proves that he is complacent. Seldom is there a passage of simple, straightforward prose. Morris is the hardest-working man in the history business.

"Theodore Rex" begins with a grandiose set piece—a prologue in which Roosevelt takes a train trip to Washington and glimpses, from his window, something that symbolizes every major aspect of American life—and the book gradually settles into a style that's just a little less frantic about holding our interest. Still, Morris's obsessive reader-friendliness often has the opposite of the intended effect—it stops you, or, at least, sends you back to the endnotes, because you wonder how he can possibly know exactly what long-dead characters were

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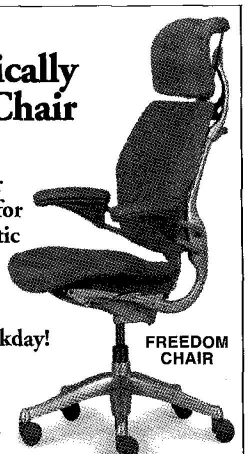

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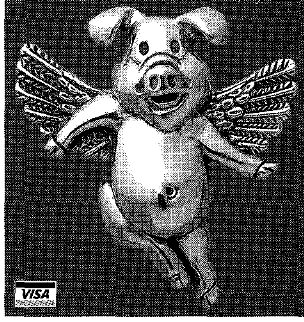

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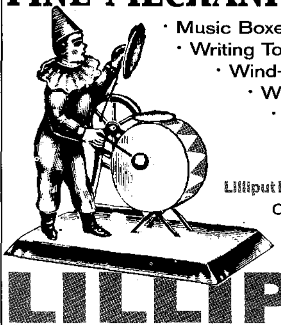

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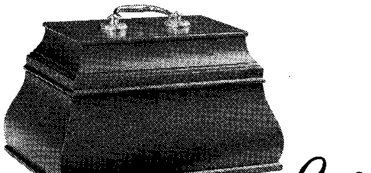

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saying, and even thinking, during a particular dramatized moment. Here, for example, is a passage bordering on a Rooseveltian interior monologue:

> To Roosevelt, as to all marathon campaigners, the trip became an accelerating blur, a mélange of whistle-stops, poking hands, curious eyes, and bands, bands, bands, raucously thumping. In between each, a few pages of English medieval poetry. A valley, a gleaming river. Vermont. Evening reception in Burlington. Night cruise on Champlain. Sleep. Lazy lakeside Sunday. Rest for raw throat. Sleep. Monday. September now; the lake chill-blue. Almost a year ago, on an island lying green in that water, a garden party, a shrill summons to the telephone. Czolgosz. McKinley. "Little ground for hope." Dread anniversary approaching. What effect might it have on mad minds?

As sources for this, the endnote cites two newspaper clippings, a letter not written by Roosevelt, and the page from Morris's previous Roosevelt volume in which T.R. learns that McKinley has been shot.

For all Morris's narrative high jinks, he does give us a new way of thinking about Roosevelt, and that is as a politician. It's a measure of our ingrained anti-governmentalism that when we go looking for heroes among past holders of public office we find people who appear anti-political, or accidentally political. Washington, Jackson, and Eisenhower were victorious generals, Lincoln a tragic poet, Jefferson an intellectual. It's quite easy to make Theodore Roosevelt seem nonpolitical, because he was active in so many other fields, and became President through the happenstance of assassination. Like the other Presidents I've just named, though, he was actually far from a Cincinnatus. Throughout his adulthood, he devoted most of his prodigious energy to politics, or what he, and the others, might have called "public life," or "public service." What's more, he behaved and thought like a politician. His artistic medium was people. He craved contact with them. He adored handshaking and public speaking—anything that would put him at the center of an admiring crowd—and he also relished the nonpublic aspect of politics, the maneuvering and bargaining. He expertly managed his relations with potential rivals and essential aides. He drew Mark Hanna, the leader of the corporate, anti-Progressive wing of the Republican Party, into a warm embrace until Hanna was safely dead. He cycled his starting rotation of Taft, John Hay, and Elihu Root in and out of the major Cabinet positions. He closely attended, through patronage, to the health of the Republican Party.

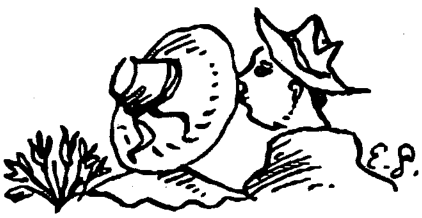
Perhaps the easiest thing to miss about Roosevelt, because of the flamboyance of his personality, is that he also had a politician's essential caution. Louis Auchincloss observes that "the great and deciding moment of T.R.'s life" came during the 1884 Presidential campaign, when he chose to support a Republican nominee whom he disliked, James G. Blaine, rather than sit out the election in a mugwumpish sulk, as many of his politically minded Harvard classmates did. From then until the Bull Moose campaign of 1912, he stayed inside the system, even though, as Auchincloss says, he preferred to think and to express himself in moral terms. Morris reminds us that after Roosevelt's White House dinner with Booker T. Washington became controversial, their warm relationship was confined largely to correspondence; there were no further social invitations. He sympathetically received a delegation of prominent Jews who wanted him to lodge a protest with the tsar against pogroms in Russia, which was good of him, but he declined to lodge the protest. He championed campaign-finance reform, but when he ran for reëlection in 1904 he accepted contributions from most of the leading robber barons, and he rewarded one of his old railroad-trust combatants, E. H. Harriman, who had ponied up generously, with a one-on-one evening at the White House whose content even Morris doesn't presume to know.

Most important, rather than speak softly and carry a big stick, Roosevelt usually spoke loudly in public and then, with unerring instinct, privately found a way to forge a compromise. Whenever he was in a dangerous situation, by Morris's account, he steered clear of the aggressive approach that you would think, from his rhetoric, he was naturally inclined to. That is the main lesson of "Theodore Rex," and, now that we're in a dangerous situation of our own, it's a lesson that Roosevelt's present-day admirers should not, while swooning, miss. ♦

BRIEFLY NOTED

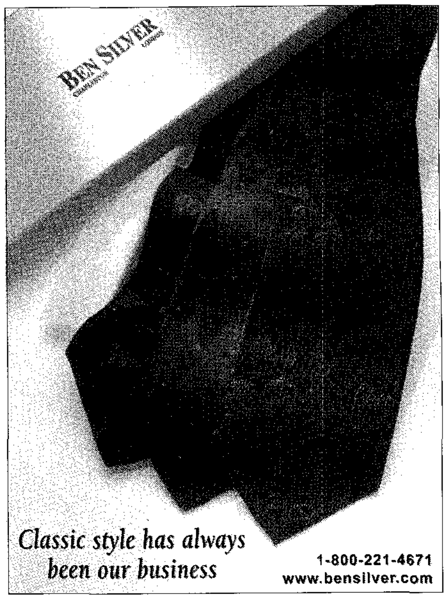
Falling Angels, *by Tracy Chevalier (Dutton; $24.95).* In Chevalier's eloquent first novel, "Girl with a Pearl Earring," the magus was the painter Johannes Vermeer. Here the centrifugal force is the late Victorian age itself. Two little girls, Maude Coleman and Lavinia Waterhouse, meet in the cemetery where their families have adjoining plots; their friendship and their acquaintance with a gravedigger's boy, Simon, are the first links in an elaborate chain of disturbing events that will end in tragedy. It's a neatly made mourning bracelet, but, while the author's extraordinary control over her material never wavers, the over-all effect is early Peter Weir by way of Edward Gorey: white dresses, orphic atmosphere, and intense but wholly interior poetry.

Armageddon Averted: The Soviet Collapse, 1970-2000, *by Stephen Kotkin (Oxford; $25).* In 1995, Kotkin, a professor of history at Princeton, published "Magnetic Mountain," a groundbreaking study of Stalinist socialism as it developed in the gargantuan steel town of Magnitogorsk, in central Russia. In his portrayal of that perverse utopia, the author displayed the skills of a dogged reporter and a meticulous archivist. The same strengths are evident in this brief, lucid study, which draws upon dozens of obscure Kremlin memoirs, provincial records, and interviews with top-level officials and oligarchs to provide us with the clearest picture we have to date of the post-Soviet landscape. Kotkin effectively describes how what was called "reform" was actually a continuing freefall collapse; he also expertly depicts the lingering networks and habits of the Soviet era, and how they have formed a post-imperial world in all its corrupt splendor.



London: The Biography, *by Peter Ackroyd (Nan A. Talese/Doubleday; $45).* Believing that London "defies chronology," Ackroyd jettisons linear history in favor of a huge collage of his home city. Most of his seventy-nine chapters take a theme—noise, nature, violence, sex—and range back and forth in time with confusing alacrity. Ackroyd, who has an almost mystical interest in patterns of repetition, is never happier than when, say, he is walking across a parking lot and notices a security camera at a spot where the medieval city wall once stood. He is also more interested in London's outsiders—radicals, eccentrics, criminals—than in its palaces and monarchs; Queen Victoria doesn't rate even a mention. Ultimately, the book successfully emulates its subject: it is hard to navigate but fun to explore—baffling and fascinating by turns.

Made in France, *by Richard Avedon (Fraenkel Gallery/D.A.P.; $75).* These witty, ravishing photographs were taken in the late fifties, when Avedon was still shooting Paris couture for *Harper's Bazaar*—Suzy Parker, in a Lanvin-Castillo evening dress, bent over a pinball machine at Café des Beaux-Arts; Audrey Hepburn, in Dior, propped up against the bar at Maxim's like a bejewelled fountain pen. Avedon has chosen to reproduce these images not as they first appeared, however, but in facsimiles of the engravers' prints, annotated with grease-pencil scribbles, copyright stamps, and precise, typed labels composed by the editor-in-chief of *Harper's Bazaar*, Carmel Snow. "A picture in a magazine is a view without a window," Avedon explains. "Here you have the window—the context of production." It was a shrewd decision: the gritty frames at once lend his fantasies a renewed buoyancy and tether them to the familiar. But perhaps the most haunting vision in this volume—an encounter between deaf-mutes and dancers in a strip club—is to be found in an afterword, written by the photographer, which has the dark power of a Flannery O'Connor story.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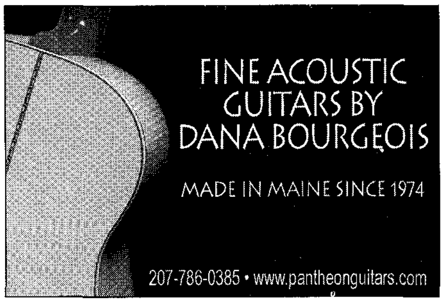
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THE ART WORLD

LUCKY STROKES

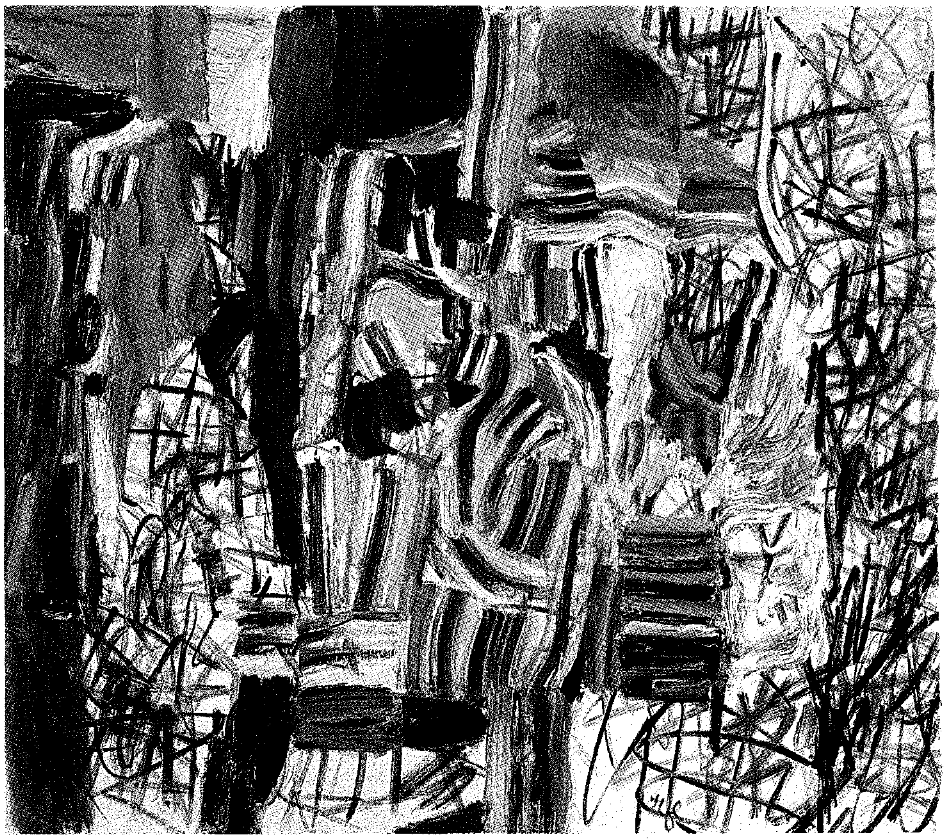
A luminous show of Lichtensteins.

BY PETER SCHJELDAHL

Roy Lichtenstein, the prince of Pop, who died in 1997, was heroically untempted by meaning. With spectacular sang-froid, he paraded themes of love and war in his early cartoon paintings. Later, he filleted the signature styles of modern masters from Monet to de Kooning as if they were only snazzy design ideas. Most outrageously, he turned his refrigerating gaze upon a fundamental cynosure of meaning in art: the painter's brushstroke, which comprehends the world in a gesture. All this is old news. And yet a large show entitled "Brushstrokes: Four Decades," at the Mitchell-Innes & Nash gallery, surprises, with its cool majesty. Lichtenstein feels new again.

Many of the works—paintings, drawings, and sculptures, mainly from the nineteen-eighties—are unfamiliar. (All are from the artist's estate.) Working drawings provide modest revelations about Lichtenstein's studio practice—demonstrating, for example, that he would first make quick sketches, then project and render them on canvas as hard-edged designs. But no fresh information explains the show's impact, which breaks a resistance to Lichtenstein that has built up in me through decades of exposure to his predictable, relentlessly upbeat imagery. His renewed appeal seems a sign of the times. I think that many of us are hungry for classicism of an American kind. Things that began to seem monotonous in their perfection—including abstractions by Ellsworth Kelly, another steely hedonist who looks particularly strong nowadays—excite as blazons of enduring value.

Lichtenstein was born in Manhattan in 1923. After serving with the Army in the Second World War, he spent ten years in Ohio, teaching at Ohio State University, taking odd jobs, and raising a family. The character of his art during that period of obscurity is conveyed in a remarkably prescient review by the realist painter and critic Fairfield Porter, which appeared in *ARTnews* in 1952. Porter welcomed Lichtenstein as "a young newcomer" who "spreads one flat color next to another and lets it alone. It always works." Porter continued, "It almost seems that he has done it all before, in another life perhaps, so that now it is no trouble at all. He is a natural." Still, Lichtenstein remained little known until 1961, when he made his first painting directly from a cartoon, "Look Mickey," and was introduced to Andy Warhol by Leo Castelli. That year, he turned thirty-eight—pretty long in the tooth for a Young Turk.

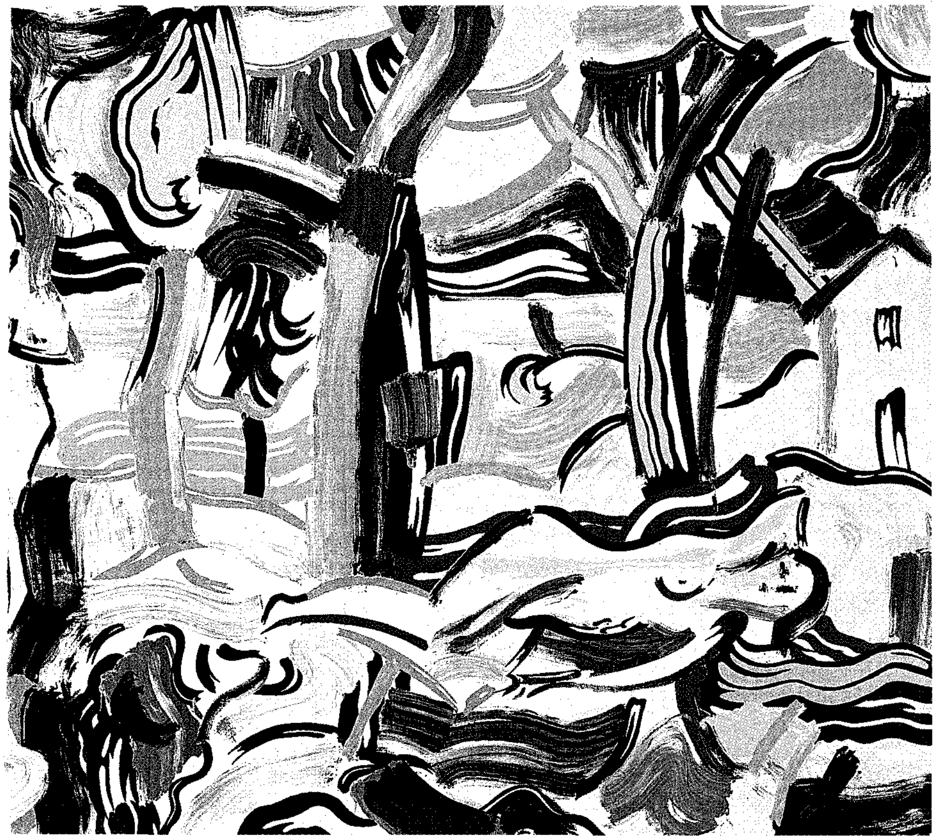


In "Variations #7" (1959), Lichtenstein's playfulness was swamped by an overblown styl

Did Lichtenstein's frustrating early career give an aggressive edge to his mature art? I think so. On some level, he never ceased to be a bruised outsider. The earliest painting in the show, the miserable but interesting "Variations #7" (1959), suggests that his success was not foreordained. A blowsy pastiche of Abstract Expressionism, it deploys cheerful colors in flurried scrawls and juicy smears. Many short, parallel strokes are sandwiched together in compact ranks and stacks—a lively idea that attains no traction in the over-all frazzle. Plainly, the artist wants to deliver the pleasures of paint and color as directly as possible, but this modest desire is swamped by the imperatives of an overblown style.

By the late nineteen-fifties, the commanding examples of Pollock and de Kooning had spawned a "second generation" of grandiose pictorial rhetoricians who made up in attitude what they lacked in conviction. No faction could have been less congenial to Lichtenstein's shy, punctilious temperament. When he started lifting motifs from comic books, it was with the euphoria of liberation. Pop provided a deadpan mask for his ambition, behind which he could exercise his talent for almost subliminal nuances of sprightly form. The ordeal of his attempts to muster the virile bravura of Action painting found relief in mockery.

In the Pop revolution of the early sixties, the palace of high art was stormed by mild-mannered barbarians, who dispensed with the sophisticated ironies of their immediate forebears Robert Rauschenberg and Jasper Johns. Rauschenberg's notorious erasure of a drawing by de Kooning and Johns's perversely sensitive paintings of flags and targets had expressed high-strung anxieties of populist influence. The Pop insurgents squared serious art with the larger culture by embracing—or, in the case of Lichtenstein's pseudo-Ben Day dots, simulating—techniques of mechanical reproduction. Traditions of modern art remained in force, but only as elements of a pragmatic new order. With the aplomb of a crack engineer, Lichtenstein showed that the visual rhetoric of comic strips, with minimal adjustments, could generate power and beauty to rival the art of museums.



the time of "Figures in Landscape" (1985), he had perfected his impetuous classicism.

© ESTATE OF ROY LICHTENSTEIN

It was with a competitive eye on art history that Lichtenstein conducted a brisk march through the conventional genres of portrait, still-life, landscape, and history painting, adapting them to his cartoon look as if he were translating the Great Books into slang. His first "Brushstroke" (1965), which was taken from a comic book entitled "Strange Suspense Stories," initiated a new genre. A subsequent painting in the series depicts a yellow swath with black "ridges" that efficiently describe a loaded brush's blobby attack, streaky course, and feathered finish. At one corner there's a raffish dribble, representing excess paint. The joke of an impetuous gesture, fussily portrayed, not only amuses but generates its own suspense. The big, bold swipe also stirs up a tumult of art-history associations, which are as vivid and yet inaccessible as sea life viewed from a glass-bottomed boat.

Lichtenstein soon dropped the brushstroke theme to concentrate on his schematic burlesques of canonical modern masters—Picasso, Matisse, Magritte, Léger, and so on. These are his weakest works, on the whole. Merely clever and handsome, they leach the emotional drama from images that are still affecting. Next to them, Lichtenstein's playfulness seems as callow as museum gift-shop souvenirs.

Then, in 1981, Lichtenstein revived the brushstroke with complex ideas that gave his art new life. In a way, he returned to the troubled territory of "Variations #7," only this time with triumphant confidence. By 1982, he was augmenting decoy strokes with real, freehand ones. The effect is a double whammy. It's as if some toys in a kids' game of cops and robbers were loaded with live ammo. Stylistic allusions loosen up, intermingle, and at times disappear in welters of paint that look improvised. That the pictures are composed with utmost deliberation amplifies the delight with which the viewer discovers one cunning virtuosity after another. Meanwhile, Lichtenstein began spinning off brushstroke designs in indoor and outdoor sculptures—right now there's a fine big one on the plaza in front of the Seagram Building—and even in furniture. These three-dimensional works are at once insouciantly mighty and minor in the disarming vein of an Alexander Calder. But painting was always Lichtenstein's first concern.

"Figures in Landscape" (1985) is a large canvas that suggests the performance of a terrific jazz band with a cerebral pianist (Dave Brubeck, say) and some Weimar backup (think Kurt Weill). A reclining nude, swiftly outlined in six colors, drifts amid actual and depicted flares of paint, mostly blue and gray, as, overhead, predominantly red and yellow elements swoop and clamor. A woozy Expressionist house shoulders in from the right, and vertical strokes play at being trees. The artist's lapidary carefulness melts into wonderment, as if he could hardly believe how much fun he was having.

Lichtenstein is a classicist whose art expresses a devotion to standards—from those of professional cartoonists to the most exacting formal principles of modern art. It is an art of self-effacement. Ever bright as a button, his work scarcely touches on personal feeling, let alone real-world experience. Indeed, it makes light of everything, including its own fundamental seriousness, which the artist bashfully dissembles as if it were a guilty secret. At his best, Lichtenstein has the rigorous poise of a Mondrian and the nonchalant perfectionism of Fred Astaire. These qualities presume the presence of an eager audience. As with Mondrian's art, Lichtenstein's gets better the more closely you look at it. Like Astaire, he conveys the illusion of angelic ease. Such art may seem especially luminous at a time when we worry about the utility of human endeavor. It reassures us that anything done thoroughly and with passion can be a glimpse of Paradise. ♦

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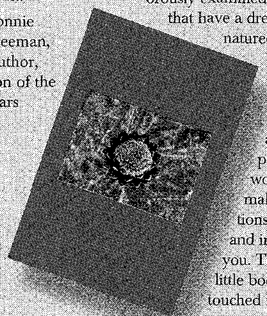

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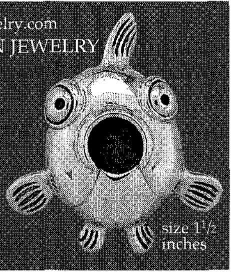

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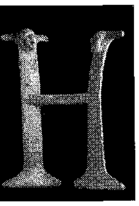

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A CRITIC AT LARGE

IMPROVISED CITY

Helen Levitt's New York.

BY ADAM GOPNIK

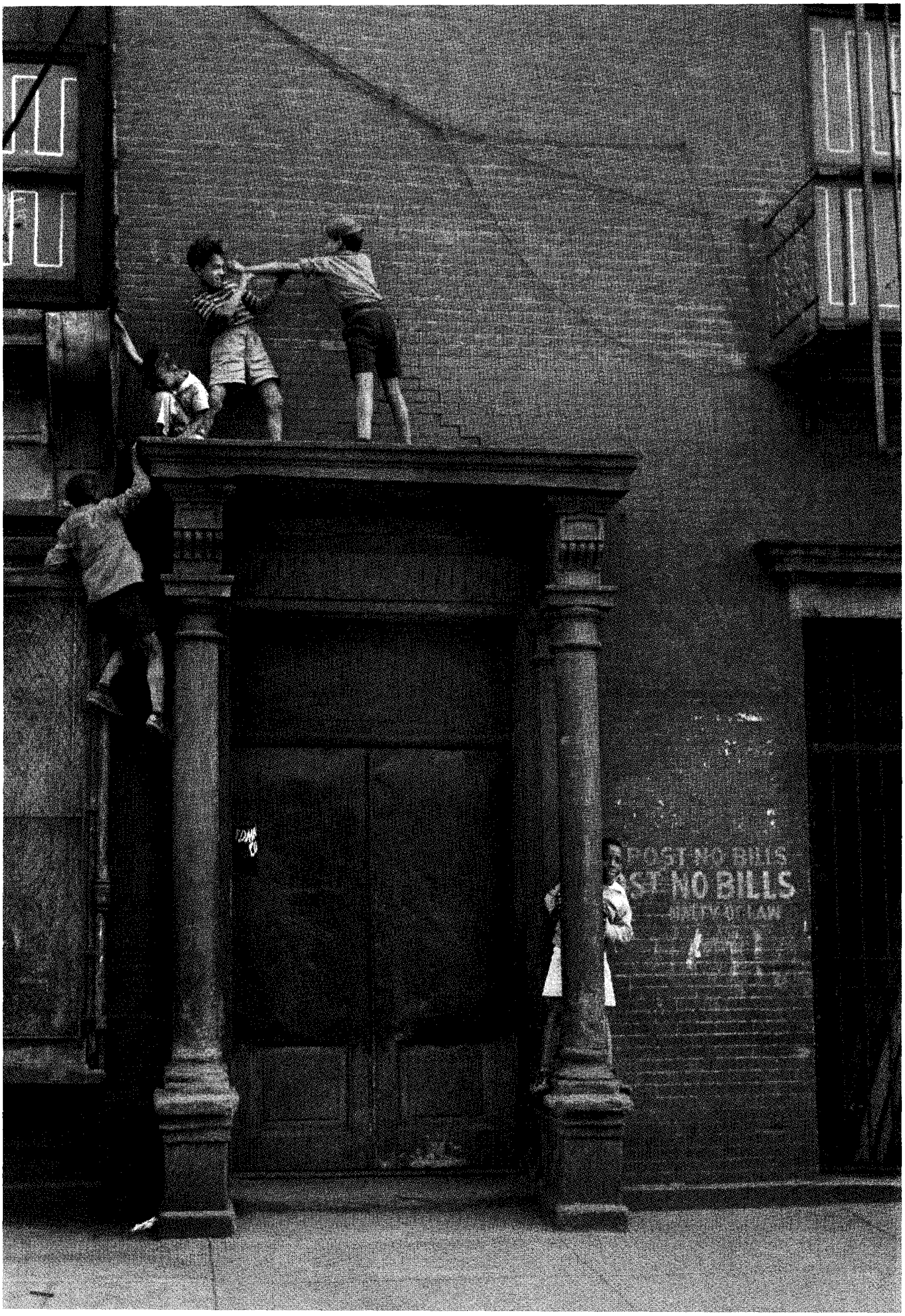
Helen Levitt, the supreme poet-photographer of the streets and people of New York, lives, at the age of eighty-eight, five flights up in a brownstone in Greenwich Village. If a jumpy and apprehensive visitor ascends those stairs in the hope of getting a shot in the arm in these perplexing times—she has, after all, seen New York through Depression and wartime and bankruptcy and bubble—he is likely to have his spirits deflated and then his heart, oddly, lifted. Asked if she has any thoughts on the events of September 11th, she says not, as the visitor might hope, "Nothing will move me from my city" but "I think you should get the hell outta here." She says this flatly, as she says everything, and she says it in a pure Flatbush accent—"outta here." She speaks in a dialect of New York locutions otherwise available only in old Leo Gorcey movies. She still says "on account of" ("I thought it would interest you on account of you . . ."), says "Yeh" instead of "Yeah," and "I dunno" instead of "I don't know." Like Holden Caulfield, she uses "goddam" as a calm, humorous all-purpose adjective (the goddam streets, the goddam people, the goddam pictures). She has even been heard to call up the occasional "youse."

Taken aback by the readiness of so pure a New Yorker to run out on New York, the visitor needs a moment or two to recall that it is this unsentimental appraisal of things as they are that has made her the supreme poet-photographer of New York. She does not love New York, much less ♥ it. She looks at it, and the accumulated knowledge becomes something less noisy than public love, less declarative and more touching. She even denies, as a New Yorker ought to, having any particular feeling for the city in the first place. (After all, one of the most evocative pieces of New York music is called "So What?") "I happen to live here," she says. "I didn't have enough money to go to New Jersey. I never went anywhere except Mexico." (For a long time, she had dreams about going to Paris, and even saw visions of Paris in her sleep, but, although she now has an exhibition in Paris that has earned a full-page review in *Le Monde*, she says that it is too late to travel.) And, anyway, it turns out, she doesn't mean it, or doesn't mean it quite the way it sounds. When she thinks about actually getting away, she quickly thinks about what she cares for. "Yeh, I like New York. I like the restaurants and the subways," she says, just as flatly—the hearths of New York, and its river.

Those hearths, that river are her territories, and they are newly visible in a new book, "Crosstown" (Powerhouse; $75), with an introduction by Francine Prose. Though the life of streets and people in New York is her almost exclusive subject, there is in her work not a single image of the big, symbolic New York. Fifth Avenue, Fifty-seventh Street, the moon above the Harbor, the Statue of Liberty, the city in the snow, the silhouetted skyline—these things do not exist for her. (In one photograph from the seventies, the Twin Towers loom in the very far distance, down Sixth Avenue.) But—and this is what separates her, in turn, from her too easily depressive opposites—there are also no homeless people or Bowery bums or drug addicts or any of the other easy images of urban squalor. What she photographs is something simpler and more elusive: people going about the business of living in a city.

"I was born in Brooklyn in 1913," she said one day not long ago over her

Levitt began specializing in pictures of children in the late thirties: "People think I love children, but I don't. It was just that children were out in the streets."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dining-room table. "I lived in Bensonhurst until I was eighteen. I went to school at New Utrecht—we called it Nutrecht—and dropped out before my senior year. We moved to Thirty-sixth and Lexington. A nice apartment. Only ninety dollars a month. I wanted to be a photographer because I wanted to be an artist and I couldn't draw. Started to take pictures of black people and working-class neighborhoods. I found them extremely exotic. I was affected by the time, and I tried to photograph the working class. Show 'conditions.' Cartier-Bresson's work was a revelation. He showed that using a camera to show 'conditions' was a limited thing. I started photographing people."

In the late thirties, Levitt began setting out on picture-finding safaris in the streets of New York, and they continue to this day. Her favorite places to find pictures were the West Forties and Spanish Harlem and the Lower East Side. She began to capture, unselfconsciously, the special geography of New York. The long straight streets and surprisingly nineteenth-century housing stock, all those stoops and fire escapes and porches and illuminated sidewalks—she got them all. She began to "specialize" in pictures of kids, though not, she insists, out of any particular feeling for them: "People think I love children, but I don't. Not more than the next person. It was just that children were out in the streets." Levitt's children are the Pygmies of the New York jungle, the people who, with their blowpipes giving them the illusion of security, continue to hunt elephants. Very soon, she became, as Jimmy Durante used to say, duh toast of duh intellectuals. "I guess the first time I met Walker I met Jim," she may remark casually, and it takes a moment or two to grasp that Walker is Walker Evans and Jim is James Agee. "Jim really loved photographs; Walker loved writing much more than photography," she adds. Agee and Evans both became friends of hers, and Agee a frequent collaborator. (They worked together on the still unsurpassed New York documentary film "In the Street.") All the while, with a certain sardonic indifference, she continued to walk the streets—setting her focus at twelve feet and using a "right-angle finder," a sleight-of-hand device that lets a photographer pretend to take a picture in one direction while actually pulling the trigger in another. ("These days, you couldn't use it. They'd think you were from the I.N.S.")

Seen from any kind of distance, she belongs to the International Style of Cartier-Bresson. Yet the emotional aura of her pictures is quite different from that of the pictures of Cartier-Bresson's other disciples, of Boubat and Doisneau and Louis Stettner, with their pregnant moments and soon-to-be-pregnant lovers. She knows this, and explains it simply. "I'm better with empathy," she says. "I can feel what people feel." Her New Yorkers tend toward two moods. One is indolent boredom and melancholy inwardness. The other is fierce, even forced, gaiety and holidaying. On the subway, her people sink into themselves; on the street they step up into a role, with what Francine Prose nicely calls "paradoxically unselfconscious theatricality." Where Cartier-Bresson took pictures of Parisians who show off and settle in, who belong, Levitt's New Yorkers dress up and act out. They aspire, and they wear homemade masks. No one is better than Levitt with New York kids—at least, as they were until the great sucking-in of television. Her children chase things, or wonder at things. They get wrapped up in streamers and draw cryptic graffiti on tenement stoops and open fire hydrants or just jitterbug. Small boys look warily at dogs.

In the Parisian photographers, the force of the past, of a civilization pressing down, weighs on the faces of the children. Cartier-Bresson's famous small boy with his wine bottles is responding to a cultural pattern: he wants

to be a grownup, a man who drinks wine. The weight on Levitt's kids is more often the easy come, easy go press of the movies and television and cheap entertainment—of show business. They want to be the way stuff is in the movies, part of the show: A No. 1, king of the hill, top of the heap. The Parisian kids are learning a world; the New York kids are making one up. (Many of Levitt's best photographs were taken on Halloween.) When Boubat shows five boys playing Indians in Paris in 1954, there is a note of irony and self-consciousness in the boys' eyes. When Levitt's Harlem boys play gangsters, they're dead serious, almost too serious, given the "conditions": they are their play. Timidity, irony, a sense of the difficulty of the world lie on Boubat's and Doisneau's children. The New York children make themselves up as they go along. "Improvised Lives" would be a good title for a book of Levitt's photographs; and the lives take place in an improvised city.

Here's a picture. Two boys are in the courtyard behind an apartment building on Halloween. Everything is relentlessly bleak—the fire escape, the stained and pitted brick, the boarded-up windows, the lot littered with ash and trash and soot. But the tree's trunk has a graceful curve, and the two boys in their overcoats and masks have the dignity of local species. All their wisdom is: We live around here.

Although Levitt is a proud reporter, insisting on the exterior, matter-of-fact, impersonal quality of her work, from the beginning of her career she refused to become a journalist. (A reporter says what she sees; a photojournalist sees what everyone else is saying.) She took only one magazine assignment, and that was for a *Sports Illustrated* story about a pigeon fancier on New York roofs. "They turned the pictures down. Too much pigeon shit." She has made a living as a film editor and, lately, from the sale of prints and books.

In the sixties, she began to work with color. Like her good friend Saul Steinberg, who once made her a camera of tin cups and black wood, a little joke about technical fetish, she saw that the city changed fundamentally right around 1969. Now images of violence and a kind of disjointed despair—disjointed because taking place in the midst of ordinariness, more threat than fulfillment—appear. Most memorable is a solitary tabby cat beneath an abandoned car, its neck ugly red with blood. "He probably got into a fight with a rat," she says coolly. "Those rats are tough characters." When the children disappeared indoors, to watch television or smoke dope or do whatever it is they did, she started taking pictures in the garment district, one of the last places in New York with a Levitt-worthy street life. These photographs are the revelation of the book, since they make her a far more contemporary, dead-eye photographer than her Evans-and-Cartier-Bresson reputation might suggest.

Yet her two greatest photographs of the city are pictures taken in the forties of small miracles in desolate places: four East Harlem girls watch bubbles appear by the Park Avenue train tracks; four Hell's Kitchen kids chase a cheesy carrousel down a summer street. Dancing on the edge of sentimentality, the pictures last because of the calm, unprettied truth of the city—the bleak streets, the empty lots, the peeling signs, not picturesque but merely plain. The children who chase the itinerant merry-go-round, the girls who stop to see the soap bubbles are the purest representation we have, nearly heraldic images, of New Yorkers: gay, forceful, energetic, street-wise, and easily deluded by cheap and passing glamour. The bubbles will burst, the carrousel will outrace the children, and what will be left is a memory of—well, not an epiphany, really, a heightened moment in a constant stream of moments, but an urban annunciation, an angel coming down to say, "You won't believe what I got to tell you," and leaving the people on the ground to say, "You'll never believe what just happened." Levitt's photographs, like her city, though occasionally they rise to beauty, are mostly too quick for it. Instead, they have the quality of frozen street-corner conversation: she went out, saw something wonderful, came home to tell you all about it, and then, frustrated, said, "You had to be there," and you realize, looking at the picture, that you were. ♦

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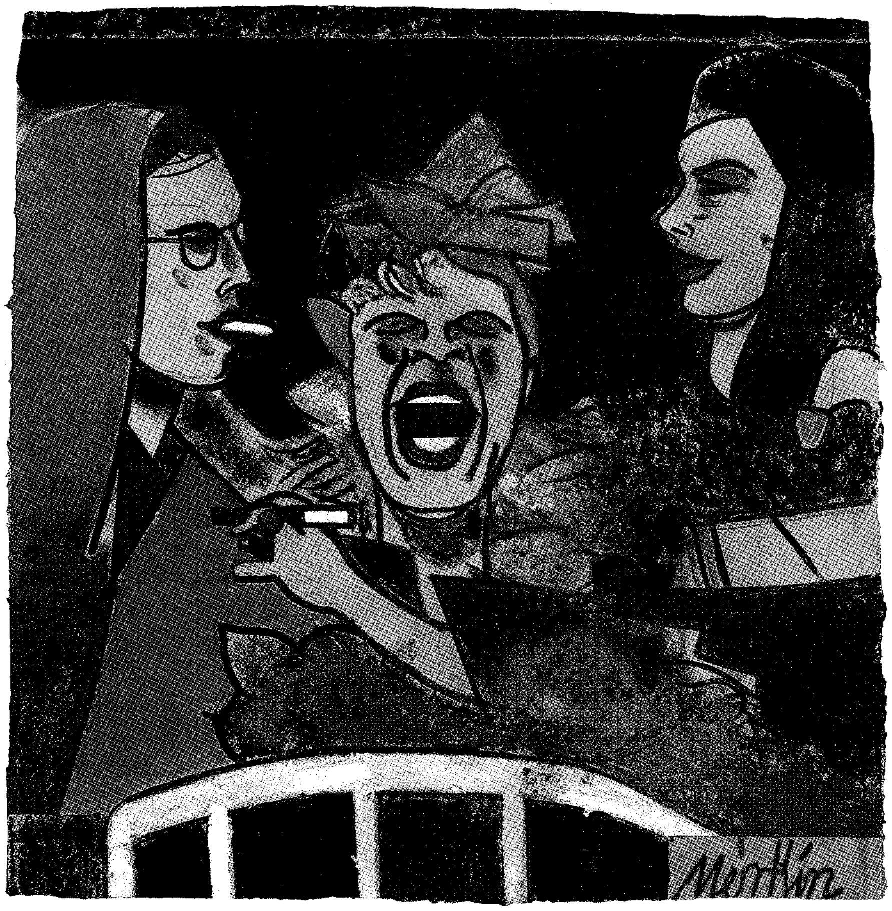
THE THEATRE

CATFIGHTS AND BACKBITES

Declawing "The Women."

BY JOHN LAHR

In the introduction to her crowd-pleasing 1936 Broadway comedy "The Women" (now being revived by the Roundabout, at the American Airlines Theatre), Clare Boothe Luce protests too much about her coven of pampered Park Avenue ladies and the maliciousness that is their ozone. She lists seventy-eight terms of opprobrium—"cat o' nine tongues" and "fleurs du mal" being the most piquant—with which critics originally characterized her privileged tribe. And to those who might question the accuracy of her rendition of this frivolous social landscape—a world of servants, gossip, night clubs, assignations, beauty salons, and breakfasts in bed—Luce's comeback is the old burlesque punch line "Vas you there, Charlie?"



Clare Boothe Luce's fury is whipped to froth in a Roundabout production.

My answer to her rhetorical challenge is, well, yes, I was. Her portrait rings hilariously true. Until Stephen Sondheim's 1970 song "The Ladies Who Lunch" condensed the spiritual malaise of this de-luxe life into four and a half sensational minutes, Luce's play stood as perhaps the most entertaining anthropological study of a mutant breed that, for the best part of the twentieth century, grazed at the watering holes of Western civilization in rather higher numbers and with greater cultural influence than Luce lets on. My mother was one of them; like the women here, she was beautiful and, between husbands, ended up at a Reno dude ranch, where she enjoyed the sport of romancing the buckaroos so much that she asked that her ashes be dumped in the Nevada foothills. (They were.)

"I'm—a virgin—a frozen asset," one of Luce's women jokes. Although virtually none of these ladies work, they embody the ruthless competitive spirit of entrepreneurial capitalism. Beauty and sexuality are their funds, and we see the women, at boutiques and beauty parlors, reinventing themselves as marketable commodities and, in their breakups and pickups, happily pursuing market forces. The "jungle-red" fingernails that are brandished throughout the play (and invoked in its last line) underscore the survival-of-the-fittest subtext, and Darwinism is the lesson that is finally learned by the play's only more or less decent soul, Mary (the excellent Cynthia Nixon), a Minnie Mouse who turns into a Machiavelli.

In spirit and in attack, "The Women" owes much of its venom to Restoration comedy. Here, where the men are perpetually at work and the women perpetually at play, talk becomes a kind of erotic destiny—what one character calls "orgasm by gossip." The women's backbiting gives them a certain reckless freedom, in which the golden handcuffs that shackle them to their conventional lives are momentarily thrown off. Verbally, at least, they are living dangerously. Through their constant character annihilations, they inflict on others the emptiness they feel in themselves.

Luce sets down café society's noblesse oblige perfectly. But in the Roundabout revival the director, Scott Elliott, who mugged Noël Coward's "Present Laughter" a few Broadway seasons ago, paints over the elegant stage pictures with his own acrylic strokes. He can't quite get a handle on the deep alienation that informs Luce's knowing, sour women. The look and the tone of his production are smudged; the fun machine runs, but neither at the right speed nor with the right sound. With the exception of Mary Louise Wilson, who as Mary's pragmatic mother has a pitch-perfect sense of character and class, the competent cast misses the high style that should make Luce's women at once lethal and wonderful.

As the viper-in-chief, Sylvia, the strapping Kristen Johnston delivers the laughs, if not the implications, of her role. At the gay-divorcée dude ranch where she ends up, Sylvia and a breezy cynic named Miriam (Lynn Collins) get into a sensational kicking-biting-scratching-hair-pulling fracas, which I hereby award to Johnston on points. Despite the boffo business, Johnston, in particular, is lumbered by Isaac Mizrahi's surprisingly unattractive costumes, a misguided attempt to comment on the characters. (The women's discredit should come not from how they look but from what they do.) Johnston is forced to wear a series of ludicrous chapeaus, which make her look as if she were walking around with either a conch or a quoit on her head. Nevertheless, she has a strong line in withering ripostes. When the home-wrecking blond trollop Crystal (Jennifer Tilly) emerges from her shower in the buff, Sylvia clocks her full frontal. "I thought you didn't touch up your hair," she says.

Through the permanently pregnant Edith (the droll Jennifer Coolidge), Luce gives us a glimpse of the neglect that often accompanies privilege. As Edith suckles her newest asset in the maternity ward, she smokes a cigarette. Her friend Peggy (Amy Ryan) peers at the little guy. "What's that on his nose?" she asks. Edith looks down. "What nose? Oh, that's an ash," she says, blowing it away. It's a coruscating moment that, unusually for this production, plays as well as it's written.

Elliott begins "The Women" with a tableau of the all-female cast massed in front of Derek McLane's somewhat anachronistic New York skyline. At the finale, up to his old, foolish game of deconstruction, he has the ladies take their bows in a sort of fashion-show parade of period lingerie. This catwalk sight gag, which I suppose is meant to indicate that the women have been laid bare, in fact indicates that the director doesn't trust the import of his comedy. Luce's fury is whipped to froth, and bubbles literally rain down on the cast. "The women who inspired this play deserved to be smacked across the head with a meat-ax," Luce wrote. However, in this production we're the ones who are hit on the head, with the blunt instrument of Elliott's theatrical imagination. ♦

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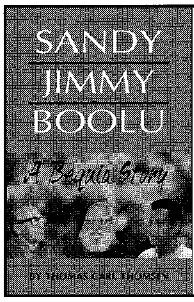

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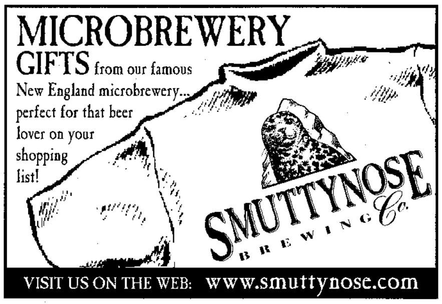

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The New Yorker (ISSN 0028-792X), published weekly (except for six combined issues: Feb. 19 & 26, Apr. 23 & 30, June 18 & 25, Aug. 20 & 27, Oct. 15 & 22, Dec. 24 & 31) by The Condé Nast Publications Inc. (4 Times Square, N.Y., N.Y. 10036-6592), which is a subsidiary of Advance Publications, Inc. Vol. LXXVII, No. 36, November 19, 2001. Periodical postage paid at New York, N.Y., and at additional mailing offices. Authorized as second-class mail by the Post Office Department, Ottawa, Canada, and for payment of postage in cash. Canadian Publication Mail Sales Product Agreement No. 190969. Canadian goods-and-services-tax registration number R123242885. Registered as a newspaper at the British Post Office.
POSTMASTER: Send address changes to The New Yorker, Box 56447, Boulder, CO 80328-6447. PRINTED IN U.S.A.

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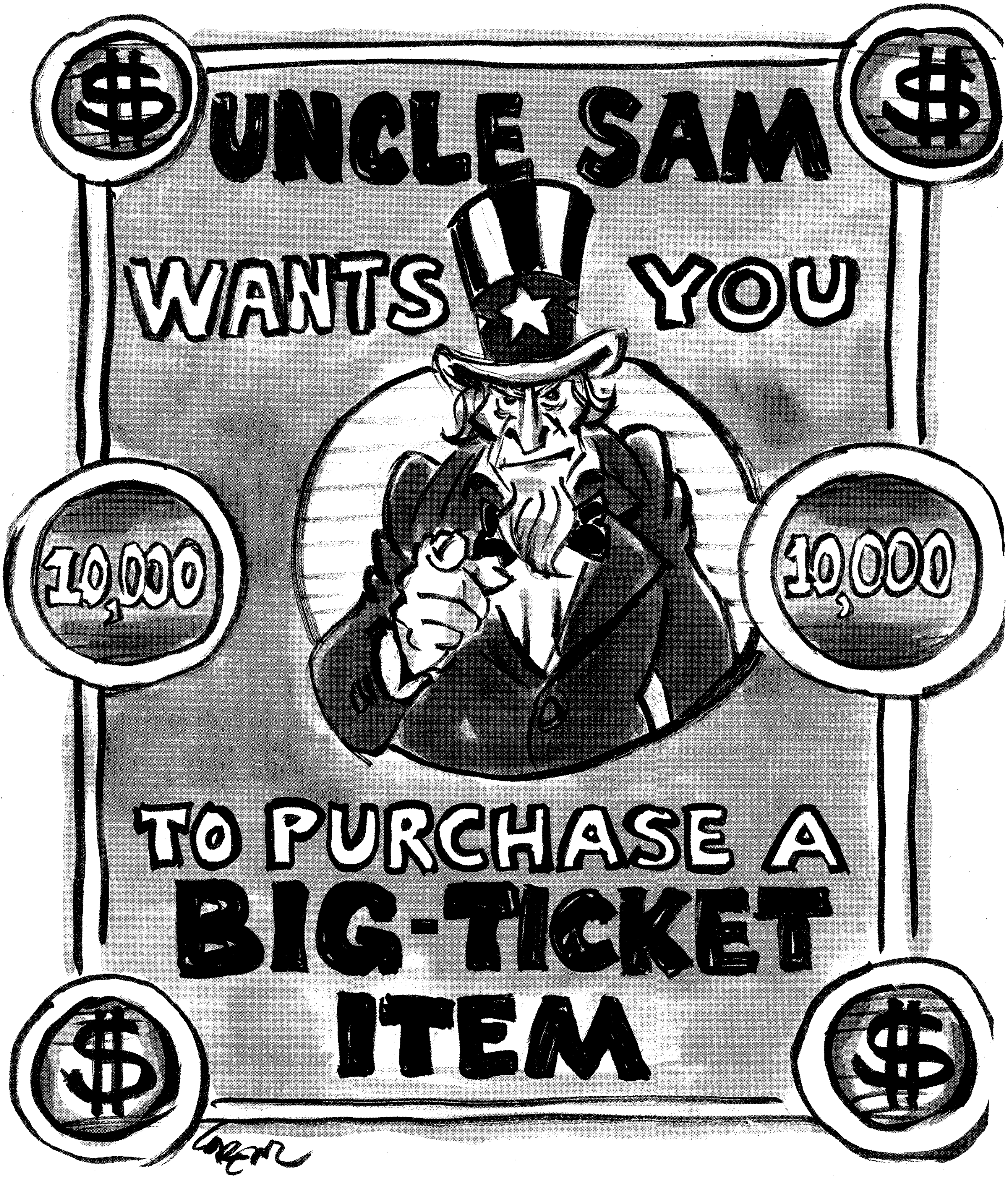
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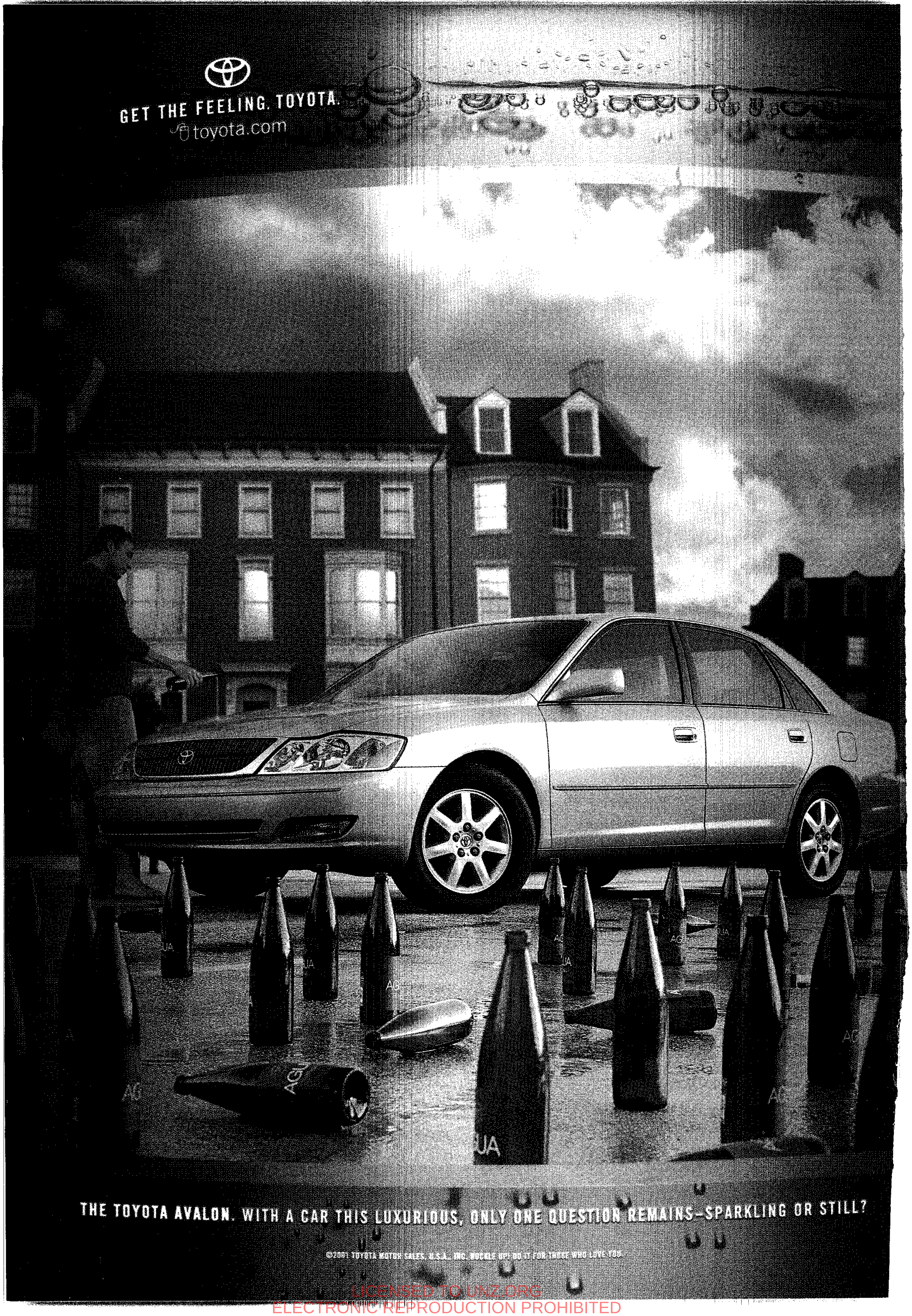
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